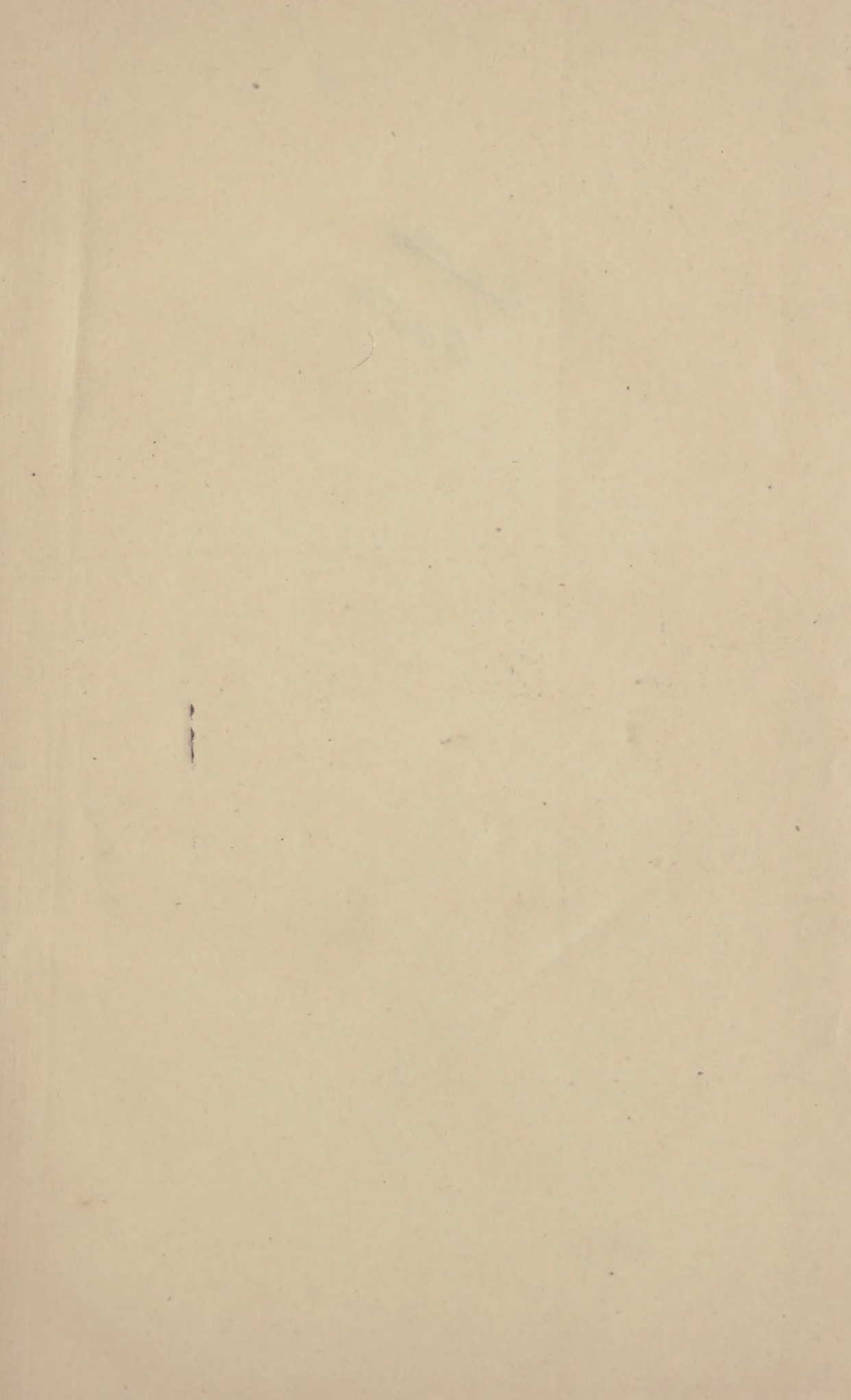


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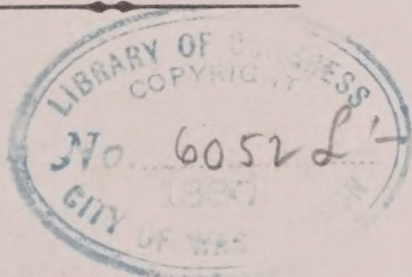
VAGABOND AND VICTOR.

THE STORY OF DAVID SHELDON.

BY
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"OLD PORTMANTEAU," "CHINKS OF CLANNYFORD,"
"WE THREE," ETC.



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# VAGABOND AND VICTOR.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *THE SHADOWED HOME.*

THE rainy autumn afternoon was darkening into twilight; sombre shadows had already gathered in the corners of the room; and even at the window, where the mother sat, there was but a dim gray light. It revealed only too plainly, however, the smallness of the sum she held—a two-dollar bill, a silver quarter of a dollar and two dimes. Count it forward or backward as she would, bill or coins first, it did not increase by a single penny, and with a sigh she dropped it slowly back into her purse—a lean, hungry-looking purse that seemed always asking for more. Two dollars and forty-five cents! A meagre allotment for the week's provisions,

and Nat so needed new boots, and Billy's old jacket was entirely too thin for these cold days. The thought of a single need opened the door for a troop, and they filed before her mental vision in seemingly endless procession.

The mother leaned back wearily. Her head was aching—that was nothing uncommon—but her yielding to it so far as to be sitting there was, and told that the pain was worse than usual. Her occupation had not soothed the throbbing; and, realizing this, she tried to turn from it and forget all her inner world in the world without. But the narrow street did not present a very cheering prospect with its wet walks, dripping eaves and fences, and little pools forming in the hollows of the doorstones. The leafless trees bent and swayed in the wind like mourners in a passion of grief, and tossed their long arms pleadingly—their empty arms that seemed reaching after the vanished beauty and treasures of their summer-time. There were but few people abroad, at least in that part of the city, and they passed by with bent heads and hurried steps to escape the

storm. To what sort of homes were they going? and would they carry joy or sorrow with them? the watcher at the window vaguely wondered. And did they really belong anywhere, and feel that there was a place for them? The world of late seemed so crowded, as if there were scarcely room in it for her and hers!

The twilight faded rapidly, and presently the lamplighter made his round, the street-lamps twinkling out through the grayness and mist where he passed. Then a light appeared in the window of the little store opposite, where a bell tinkled whenever the door opened or closed. The sound of some one entering there suddenly recalled the but half-absent thoughts of the watcher to life's pressing needs. She turned as a step sounded in the adjoining room:

"Louise!"

A young girl came to the door; that movement, with the questioning glance of her black eyes, was her answer.

"We have no bread for supper. Will you run over to the store for a loaf?"

Louise nodded; her silent moods were

many, her talkative ones rare. She was not more than fourteen, yet nothing in face or manner told of lingering childhood while she stood there waiting for her mother to draw out again the worn purse. When the money was placed in her hand she only glanced at it and did not move.

"Some tea for you too, mother," she said quietly, not interrogatively.

"Well—" the mother hesitated. "No, I think I can do without it to-night."

"Some tea for you," repeated Louise. "This is not quite money enough."

The mother yielded to the persistent tone and the outstretched hand, but said half regretfully as she added the extra change,

"It may help my head, yet I don't really feel as if I ought to send for it; I could do without."

"It's not worth while scrimping ourselves to death to save a living," replied Louise sententiously.

Poor Louise! there was not much of sentiment or poetry about her. Life and herself had been matter-of-fact realities so far, and both were sometimes rather bitter.

She threw a shawl over her head and picked her way across the muddy street to the lighted window. As the jingling bell announced her entrance, gentle, lame Miss Ruey, sitting back by the stove, looked up from her knitting with a smile, while brisk, erect, angular Miss Hannah hastened behind the counter to attend to her customer. Sisters these two women were—"Twins, born so," Miss Hannah was wont gravely to answer to any inquiries—but they were strangely unlike. Miss Hannah took care of the small house and store, and Miss Ruey took care of Hannah, though the latter never dreamed it.

"How is the mother to-day?" asked the little lame woman's kindly voice.

"Headache," replied Louise briefly.

"What a pity!" said Miss Ruey sympathizingly.

"Well now, I don't know what you think," began Miss Hannah grimly, "but I'll tell you what I think—that she has it dreadful often for common headache; and if 'twas me I should expect it meant trouble—softening of the brain or something."

“Not very likely ; soft things never come to our house. It might be hardening of the brain, if there is any such thing,” replied Louise.

“Well, you don’t know,” pursued Miss Hannah. “We can’t ever tell what’s just afore us ; and if ’twas me I’d consider it my duty to keep thinking about it and get resigned.”

“I don’t,” retorted Louise promptly. “There are plenty of things already here that I’m not the least bit resigned to yet, and I don’t mean to take any work of that sort ahead ; I’ve got enough to last me a lifetime now ;” and she picked up her package and departed.

“Queer child !” said Miss Hannah shortly.

“Poor child !” said Miss Ruey pityingly.

“’Tain’t every one,” remarked Miss Hannah reflectively, “that feels as I do about the duty of resignation. Why, the other night, when the fire-bells waked me, I just began to think what if our little place and store and everything should catch fire and burn, and we not be able to save a thing, and lose all our savings, and be turned out at our

time of life, and maybe have to bring up at the poorhouse ; and I tell you what, it looked hard : I didn't know how I'd stand it. And then says I, ' You'd have to ; ' and I set my teeth and wrestled with myself, and wrestled till I really got sort of resigned 'fore I went to sleep."

Into the house across the street another step soon followed Louise's—a light, girlish step—but it paused uncertainly on the threshold.

" Why, how dark it is here ! " exclaimed the newcomer.

" Not very. It seems so because you have just come from the street and the lamps," answered the mother.

" I can't see anything," replied the girl, but, guided by the voice, she made her way to her mother's side : " How is the headache now ? " Then, comprehending intuitively the gloomy thoughts that had gathered in the gloomy twilight, she went on, without waiting for reply : " I do believe it is working so hard that makes your head trouble you so. You shall have a chance to rest, mother dear, if once I get that clerkship. I shall

just drop you down in an easy-chair somewhere, and not let you do anything until you are rested and strong."

"Ah! *if*, Susie! There's such an *if* in the way!" said the mother wearily.

"Not such a very big one, after all," laughed the girl. "At least, it doesn't look so now," she continued, while Louise, bringing a light into the room, paused to listen. "I saw Miss May to-day, and she says she overheard Mr. Lester telling some one that they expected to give me a place in the store, and thought there would be room for me soon. So it seems almost settled—doesn't it?—even though they haven't sent us word yet. You must cheer up, motherling, in honor of your successful daughter." Then suddenly dropping her playful tone, she exclaimed, "Oh, what a help it will be to all of us! won't it?"

"If it comes," answered the mother again, but she said it more cheerfully.

Cheering the others was Susie's vocation—not so much by conscious effort as by herself. Sunny, brave and hopeful, ready to do and quick to plan, not easily cast down, and

the first to see land in any sea of troubles, was she; so she clung joyously to this fragment of good tidings.

“I’m so glad I went out this afternoon, else I shouldn’t have heard that!” she said as with a quick glance at the old clock she coaxed the smouldering fire of the grate into a blaze and began to spread the table for supper. “I scarcely knew whether to go or not, it was so stormy, and I had to hurry to finish my sewing.”

“Should think it had been done in a hurry,” observed Louise, lifting the garment on which her sister had been working.

“Why, what is wrong with it?” questioned Susie, pausing midway in her sentence.

“Sleeve wrong side out,” replied Louise briefly.

“No! Is it? Why, how could I have made such a blunder?” cried Susie in dismay, putting down the cups and saucers she held and going to her sister’s side. “I have, really. Well, it was so dark here to-day that I could scarcely see what I was doing. I hope the work I carried home was all right. I shall have to rip this out—not to-

night, though, for our lights are so poor lately that it's hard to do anything by them."

"I don't know what they'd be doing in this house if they were not poor," said Louise.

Very different the two girls were standing there together. Susie was the elder by four years, but her lighter hair and eyes and the changing color in her face made her look younger for her age than did her sister. She only laughed at the speech, so like Louise.

"Wait until I secure my position and we revel in gas and such luxuries. How glad Nat will be!" she added, returning to her hopeful thought again.

Nat came while the words were still on her lips—a boy freckled-faced, large-handed, coarsely clothed, somewhere between the two girls in age, but with a stoop in his shoulders, as if burdens had fallen too early upon them. This was all that ordinary observers would have seen in Nat, but then they would not have known, as Susie, Louise and the mother did, how hard he worked for his family, and how kind and patient he

was ; how ready to bring the coal and water to save them labor ; how much of their slender income he earned ; how he insisted that he could do without anything new a little longer, and that the money had better be spent for some one else ; how he went away whistling to his work in the woolen mills in the early morning, and would never acknowledge that he was more than "middling tired" when he came home at night.

He was pleased at Susie's story, and almost as sanguine as she.

"I should think they'd take you if they want any one," he said with boyish admiration of his pretty sister. "You're so quick at handling ribbons and such things, I'm sure you'd make a good clerk."

"And catch the true clerkly indifferent air perhaps, wear my hair frizzled and my dress ruffled to a wonderful extent, and look at customers in a patronizing way—so," laughed Susie, dropping her hands languidly and lifting her eyebrows in imitation of a specimen of young-ladyhood-behind-the-counter that she had met a few days before.

Her brightness was infectious. Even the

mother smiled as they gathered around the table, and sipping her tea said it had done her good. She was rich in her children, she whispered comfortingly to her heart that had been so sore that day.

Suddenly the cheery talk hushed as a hand fumbled at the door. There was another member of the family—one so uncertain in his coming that they never waited for him now. Every one looked up uneasily as he entered, a quick, anxious questioning in all their glances, and something of alarm in little Billy's blue eyes; but it passed, and all drew an inaudible breath of relief as the man threw aside his slouched hat and came with sullen, averted look, but quietly, to the table.

He was served in nervous haste with all the board afforded. The mother passed him a cup of the tea, which had evidently lost its relish for her, for she did not taste it again; but, except for a remark or two of hers, unanswered, no one attempted to drive the gloom from his brow by conversation; no one even mentioned Susie's golden hopes to him; and a troubled silence fell upon the

circle. He did not linger long, however; he arose first, and taking up his hat went immediately out again.

It was like the slow lifting of a cloud. Billy's childish talk began once more—began with a stab that reached the mother's heart: "Jim Sykes says if he had a father like mine he'd run off and never live with him no more, so he would! and lock the door too!" But a moment later he touched a safer topic, and gradually they all resumed, in part at least, the tone of the earlier evening. Such interruptions were, alas! so common!

Susie, gathering up the tea-things, stumbled over a footstool standing in the broad glow of the firelight, and when Louise wondered at her awkwardness Nat playfully declared that she was so uplifted with her grand prospects that she could see nothing at her feet. And when, a little later, she attempted to aid Billy in mastering an arithmetic lesson, and gravely held the book upside down while she stared in perplexity at the page, they all laughed at her abstraction, despite her protest that the light was dim.

Two pairs of worn little boots settled themselves upon the battered old fender as Susie and Louise lingered for their customary talk over the dying fire after the others had bidden good-night. To be sure, the talk was chiefly Susie's, but Louise was more communicative in these firelit half hours with her sister than at any other time. This night she began the conversation, striking through all glittering "perhapses" and possibilities to see what solid ground might be under them.

"You really think you will get that place, Sue?"

"Yes, I do," answered Susie slowly. "You see, Mr. Lester spoke encouragingly at first—said they might need some one this fall, and afterward promised that if they did he would send for me. And now Miss May overheard him mention me by name and say they should send for me soon. Yes, I can't help feeling pretty sure about it now; and oh, I am so glad!"

"And if you get it," pursued Louise the practical, "what will you do for clothes? The girls in stores dress nicely—I suppose

they have to; they wouldn't want anybody that didn't—and you have scarcely anything."

"Well," began Susie, facing this problem, "this dress—" touching the one she wore.

"Is a calico, and you can't wear it much longer; it's out of season now—if we had any seasons to our dresses," interrupted Louise.

"There's my brown one—"

"The only one you have, and a good deal worn at that," said Louise, concluding the sentence again. "I suppose the other clerks will think it a dreadfully poor affair."

Susie's face clouded for a moment. She had her share of girlish pride and sensitiveness, though she had found little opportunity to gratify one or shield the other.

"Well," she said with a faint laugh that had a touch of pain in it, "if I have but the one dress, there will be no question of what I shall wear; and after all, Louise, it will not look so badly brightened up with fresh collars and pretty white aprons—"

"Apron," corrected Louise gravely. "You know we have but one decent one

between us, and we shouldn't have had that if we hadn't saved instead of wearing it."

"It shall take the place of *aprons* anyway, if I do have to wash and iron it nearly every night to have it fresh for morning," said Susie determinedly. "And I don't care what the others think of my dress. Yes I do, too; but I'll look as well as I can, and try not to mind any more than I can help until I can get something new. Oh, Louise! this will be worth so much to us! Mother can do part of the sewing that comes in, and she will not need to work so hard, and we shall not have to pinch so dreadfully or do without so many things. It rests me only to think of it."

Even in their planning they were different. Susie drifted into some bright dreaming for the far future, while Louise, with her dark eyes fixed on the dull red coals, soberly considered how much the clerkship would be worth per month, and what they could best and first do with the money earned.

"Hark! Father is coming," said Louise, suddenly starting up.

The door was pushed noiselessly open, and

there entered—the same in dress and stature, but utterly unlike in face and manner—the one who had appeared at the table. He came forward unsteadily, but smiling broadly and rubbing his hands together as in an exuberance of complacency and good-feeling.

“My girls sitting up for me, hey?—’fectionate and lovely, like s’lubrious summer,” he ejaculated admiringly.

Louise turned sharply away to fasten the shutters for the night, but he stooped and kissed Susie, stumbling against her as he did so. She did not repulse him, for he was her father; she did not answer him by word or smile, for he was not himself, and his demonstration not love, but maudlin sentimentality. She had known a father’s kisses in her early childhood, and they were not like this.

“Where is—yer mother?” questioned Mr. Sheldon, steadying himself against the mantelpiece.

“Gone to bed,” replied Louise briefly.

“’Posing after the toils of the day—sleep of innocence ’n’ virtue,” commented Mr. Sheldon poetically. “Prize yer mother,

girls, prize her! Es'mable woman! She's been the very dog-star of my prosperity." Then he announced with an air of satisfaction, "I've planned great relief for her arduous duties. Saw a first-class well to-day, 'n' can buy it cheap. She'll have no more trouble 'bout water. I'll have it moved in back yard 'mediately—provide perennial fountain for my wife."

"She is provided with a perennial fountain of wretchedness," muttered Louise as her father staggered away to his room and she and her sister passed up the uncarpeted stairs to their chamber.

There were those who considered "Dad Sheldon's" grandiloquent speeches exceedingly amusing—those even who would furnish him the means of intoxication for the sake of the entertainment he afforded when liquor had so loosened his tongue that they could prevail upon him to "deliver an oration." But at home they failed to appreciate this diversion or to discover in it cause for laughter.

"Little danger of my being too much elated with any good that can come to me

while I must bear this burden," thought Susie sadly.

Louise deposited her lamp upon a table and walking to a window stood there silently. Across back yards and alleys she could look to where lights shone from the windows of a large house opposite—a handsome house fronting on another and quite different street from the one on which the Sheldons lived. The name blazoned on its silver door-plate was the same that decorated the signs of two liquor-saloons down town, and there was for Louise a strange fascination in watching the lights from these windows.

"I suppose they do not shine from just such apartments as this; carpets and furniture may be of different style," she mused, turning away from the outlook to the bare room around her.

Susie had whispered "Our Father which art in heaven" before she nestled her head upon her pillow; it was a sort of matter-of-course prayer kept up from her childhood. But Louise, being practical as well as honest, always stopped midway in these later years at "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our

debtors.” That petition gave her a very curious sensation in connection with the flashing lights of the great house opposite, and she could not separate the two. So she dropped the concluding sentence, and substituted—more as a form, alas! than a prayer—some words from an old prayer-book: “In all time of our tribulation, good Lord, deliver us!”

## CHAPTER II.

### *GATHERING CLOUDS.*

**W**EEEKS passed, and the longed-for offer came to Susie—the place she had so dreamed of and coveted; but she did not accept it. In the intervening days something else had come to her—unsought, unthought of at first, struggled against to the last. Slowly but surely it came, precluding the possibility of accepting the other.

There were so many mistakes in the sewing, growing more and more frequent. She marveled that she, who was wont to be so careful and deft a seamstress, had suddenly grown so careless. Usually, too, some one else discovered the blunder first. She began to wonder too why they had so many dark days; the sunlight seemed never to come brightly into the little sitting-room any more, and at night the lamps burned so dimly that

she could not see to work by them, though the others did not complain.

Then she began to notice, standing at door or window, how indistinct all objects on the opposite side of the street appeared; and one day, studying Miss Hannah's modest sign, she called in a startled tone to her sister,

"Louise, is the street smoky or foggy, or anything of that sort, to-day?"

"Why, no," answered Louise wonderingly, "Don't you see it isn't?"

"Not the least bit foggy?" questioned Susie anxiously.

"No."

"And can you read the sign over the store?"

"Of course."

"If you didn't know what it was? if you had never seen it before?"

"Yes; every letter is plain enough. Why, Sue, what is the matter?" for a sudden pallor swept over her sister's face.

"Oh, Louise, something is wrong with my eyes! The letters are all a confused mass to me. Oh, what shall I do?"

The cry was one of terror as she recalled the experience of the weeks past and understood at last its meaning. But in a few moments she grew hopeful again.

Her mother came to her, solicitous, troubled, but comforting.

"You have been trying your eyes so much of late," she said after some anxious questioning. "You have worked so much on dark goods and by lamplight that you have weakened them until everything looks blurred and dim. You must let them rest now until they grow stronger."

Susie was reassured. Her eyes were tired, only tired—that must be all. It was hard to spare time for idleness now, but a few days might be all that would be needed. And how fortunate that this had happened now, if it must come at all, instead of later, when she might be wanted at the store! So she laid aside her work with a smile and a sigh, shaded her eyes carefully from the light, indulged in long restful naps, and used the washes Miss Hannah and Miss Ruey recommended. She suffered no pain, and the tired orbs must surely be growing stronger,

she thought, as she waited with what patience she could to resume her work.

But when, after more than a week of this treatment, she threw aside the shade and stood once more at the window, the street was more misty than before, the sign dimmer, and she could no longer distinguish the persons passing in and out at the shop-door. The mother sent for a physician then—a grave, reticent man—who questioned with slow minuteness into every symptom, betraying by no look whether the answer boded good or ill; examining the eyes carefully in the fullest possible light, and occupying a time that seemed interminable to the trembling Susie and the apprehensive mother and sister. When, at last, his examination was concluded, they could not wholly understand his learned explanation of the trouble—of cause and effect—but slowly through it all the bitter truth revealed itself; the sight was fading out of those young eyes; gradually but surely it would decrease, and he had no power to arrest the disease.

“Oh, doctor, you do not mean that? Is

there nothing that can be done—nothing?” questioned the mother despairingly.

“Nothing that I can do, madam—nothing here. If she could go to New York and be under the care of Dr. S——, she might derive great benefit—might, indeed, recover entirely. I should judge it quite probable. In an institution like that, devoted to a single class of cases, there are of course many resources at command which are impossible to use in ordinary practice; and Dr. S—— has been remarkably successful.”

He bowed himself out, and Susie's dim eyes watched him hopelessly as he passed up the street. It was so sudden, so awful, this black veil dropping down over all her future! She sat stunned and silent, trying to realize her own identity—that it was out of her world so much was going—all the glory of earth and sky, the books and occupations she cared for, the faces she loved,—all slipping away to leave her in loneliness and darkness.

The mother came to her side and passed her hand caressingly over the bright hair:

“My Susie! my poor lamb!”

How tender the touch was! how toil-worn and hardened the hands! Dear mother-hands that had done so much through all the years! and now she could never lighten their work any more—never spare them or rest them, as she had so hoped to do—never again be any help to these who so needed her, but only a care and burden always. That was the bitterest thought of all.

“Oh, I cannot bear it!” she cried in anguish.

The mother only drew her arms closer around the girl. She attempted no word of consolation; she could think of none for herself.

Louise hurried out of the room, and avoided Susie's presence as far as possible all that day, attacking furiously, as if it were an enemy, whatever work was to be done, but scarcely uttering a syllable. But at evening, at the little store over the way, she was obliged to tell the story, for they had observed the physician's call and were full of neighborly interest.

“Anybody sick at your house, or did the

doctor come to see Susie's eyes? Better, ain't they? And what did he say to what she'd been using, eh? I know cold tea and quince-seed is good, any way," questioned and affirmed Miss Hannah.

"He said washes were of no use—nothing is; and he can't help her any; her eyes will get worse." Louise choked over the last word.

"Worse? You don't mean she'll lose them?" asked Miss Ruey.

Louise nodded silently.

"Going blind! Oh dear!" exclaimed Miss Hannah, shocked and startled. "Why I never thought of such a thing! I'd ought to, too, 'cause it's something that might happen to any of us, and we ought to be prepared. But it would take a tussle, I do say, to get resigned to that." She closed her eyes with a sudden snap, as if to discover how it would seem to be deprived of those organs, and drew a long breath as she opened them again. "Well, I suppose a body could if they wrastled long enough, but 'twould be tough. How does Susan seem to bear it?"

"I don't know," said Louise briefly; she could not bear to talk of it yet—"the way folks do bear what they have to—some way."

"Child, it may not be so hard, and there may be good in it yet; don't you be despairing," said Miss Ruey gently. "It looks black ahead, to be sure, but we're all like the disciples on the mount; they feared when they entered into the cloud, but after they were in they saw only the Lord and the messengers from heaven, you know."

No, Louise did not know; if she had ever heard, she had forgotten, and she answered bitterly that with so many red eyes, bleared eyes and wicked eyes in the world that could well have been spared, she didn't see why this need have come to poor Sue. She turned away then, but Miss Hannah detained her for a moment while she tied up a package of cream crackers for Susie.

"Not that I expect they'll be anything like consolation—only a body has to eat, no matter how hard a wrastle they have on hand; and cream crackers don't taste so bad as some things," she said grimly.

Louise dropped the package in her sister's lap with only the information that it was from Miss Hannah. But when she had passed out into the other room, and was alone again, some of the words she had turned from so sullenly came back to her. "The Lord and the messengers from heaven;" there was a little sound of comfort in them, even for her. If such presence could come into this cloud! The dim, half-formed thought was sufficient to make her repeat more earnestly and prayerfully than ever before her petition for deliverance in "time of tribulation."

The sisters had not lingered for their evening talk that night—the planning seemed all done now—but when Louise had seen her sister safely in bed and extinguished the light and nestled down beside her in the darkness, she found it easier to speak, and whispered, with her arms around her,

"The doctors don't know everything, Sue, and you shall go to New York!"

It sounded incoherent enough, but Susie knew what it meant—that the physician might be mistaken in his opinion, and if not

she should still have done for her the utmost that skill could do. But Susie dared not entertain the hope; she saw no way in which the promise could be fulfilled, though she had been thinking of it all the day. Already such words were beginning to seem to her like helpless voices outside thick prison-walls that shut her in, and she answered wearily,

“It is of no use, Louise.”

A new compassionate tenderness in every one around her touched and wounded, comforted and pained her, countless times daily as the week wore on. The care was sweet, but its cause so terrible! Even her father seemed shocked and grieved into something more like his olden self than he had been for a long time; and for a day or two he came home regularly, lingering by her side to question and talk with her, and suggest remedies that might be tried, until a faint hope dawned in the mother's heart that the darkness gathering about his child might open his eyes to clearer light. It was a delusive dream, soon ended; for as Susie grew worse instead of better, he strove to drown

what sorrow and disappointment he had felt in the same liquid that had drowned so many other things—hope, usefulness and manhood—and pursued his accustomed course but the more recklessly for the brief pause.

It was pitiful to watch the stricken girl, all her blithe brightness gone, her face paling and losing its roundness.

“I used to think I was brave, but I am not,” she said one day, laying her head in her mother’s lap as she often did now—dropping again into a habit of her childhood, as if the mother-love could shield or help.

Sometimes she sat for a while with closed eyes, as if trying to accustom herself to the gloom and blankness that were coming; then again she strained them eagerly in the effort to improve every precious moment of sight, watching intently the most common objects passing in the narrow street. She clung with feverish eagerness to whatever of the household tasks she could still perform, insisting upon helping even with the sewing, basting where she could no longer see to stitch—longing to crowd the days with

the utmost possible helpfulness. Frequent mistakes there were in these earnest efforts—odd blunderings and mismatchings, such as had been laughed at a few weeks before. Nobody smiled at them now; they had suddenly grown pathetic, as little commonplace things so often do in these strange lives of ours. No one pointed them out to the patient worker. They were quietly rectified when she did not observe it, such opportunities, alas! growing more and more numerous.

Sometimes she made her way across the street, going slowly, observing the exact position of gate and door, noticing every irregularity in the crossing, that she might remember it all and find her way when she could no longer see it. In the cosy little room back of the store she was always sure of a welcome, even though she disappointed Miss Hannah, who started forward briskly in expectation of a customer when the bell tinkled:

“Oh, it’s you, child? Come right in, then. Glad to see you.”

“And I’m glad to *see* you,” Susie an-

swered to the familiar greeting one day, with a faint sad emphasis on the word that had grown to mean so much to her.

“Well, I suppose so—though, to be sure, I ain’t no great things to look at,” replied Miss Hannah reflectively; “but I might be worse. I remember the time I was taken sick, and the doctor said I had the small-pox—least-ways, he didn’t say it to me, but I heard him say something about it after he had just stepped into another room—and I thought I knew what that meant. ‘Dear me!’ says I to myself, ‘your eyes kind of squinted, and your hair was sandy and you was tall and scranny before; and now, if your face has got to be like a nutmeg-grater, how you will look!’ Well, I worried and wrastled with that idea for three or four days. And there! when I’d got reconciled I found there hadn’t been a thing the matter with me but the measles. But, any way, I’d got prepared,” she concluded in a tone of satisfaction.

“But if you had thought you should never see your face again, nor any others dearer than your own—that long, dreadful

years were coming when you couldn't help any one and must be a hindrance and burden—" Susie's voice faltered. "I'd rather die!"

"Child, don't you go to talking that way," said Miss Hannah severely, though her eyes moistened and her heart was more tender than her words. "It ain't right. This is a world where we need a good deal of fortitude, for we can't tell what's going to happen, and we ought to be ready for it. We've got to bear things, and I try to keep myself braced up. Now, the other night I thought about robbers—there's been so many store burglaries lately—'What if some one should break in here, take all our money, and murder us both in our beds?'"

"Dear me! I shouldn't think it would be worth while. Why, we hardly ever have more than ten dollars at a time," interposed Miss Ruey, viewing the matter in the light of a speculation.

"That's no difference. If anybody had made up his mind to rob, he wouldn't stop long to haggle about what he'd get," insisted Miss Hannah. "It isn't best to be

too sure things won't happen. I heard a man say once that he wasn't afraid of robbers, and the very next week his cousin had her pocket picked."

Under this reproof Miss Ruey thrust her hand rather nervously into her own pocket, but her handkerchief, thimble and bit of "sweet flag" were safe. Then, as the sharp jingle of the bell called her sister into the store, she turned again to Susie, who still sat with her face half shaded by her hand, and said pityingly,

"It is hard, dear, but the Lord can help it. There's never anything so bad that it gets beyond that, and it's such a comfort! Try not to think much about the long years, for maybe they'll never come. They can only come just day by day, and there's strength promised that way, you know."

Susie did not understand the allusion. She was not familiar with the Word that was to Miss Ruey as the air she breathed. The Bible was in the Sheldon family indeed, and they considered it a sacred book, but it was not often opened. The mother read a few chapters now and then, especially when

Sunday brought her an unwonted hour of leisure; and the girls sometimes followed her example, because it seemed a fitting and proper thing to do—read with a sort of awe, not even expecting to understand very much of it, and without a thought of bringing all its characters, teachings and promises into contact with their own daily life. They went to church occasionally, when they had clothing that they thought suitable, but never regularly anywhere.

It had been different with the mother in her girlhood. There was a little country church that had even held her name among its members; and when she first came to the city, a young wife, she had been glad to answer the call of the church-bells. But afterward, when her husband began to decline going, now upon one pretext, now upon another, she did not find it pleasant to go alone. Then the children came, and she was seldom able to go; and in a few years the great trouble of her life had begun—the madness and sin that had ruined her husband and filled her cup with poverty, care and shame. The once-promising young lawyer had grad-

ually lost the business entrusted to him, and had been obliged to relinquish his office. Then he had obtained some employment at copying and kindred work, until he could no longer be relied upon to fulfill his engagements or trusted with any important documents. After that his occupations had grown less responsible and more fitful, and it was long now since he had aspired to any steady employment, or seemed to care to do much more than to keep himself supplied with liquor.

The mother had kept the children in school as long as she could, but the older ones had been obliged to leave early—Susie to assist with the sewing, Nat to go into the mill. She had sent them to Sunday-school too—a part of the time, at least, when she could fit them for going. But as they grew old enough to notice the clothing of others around them and become sensitive concerning their own, they had one by one ceased even that spasmodic attendance; only little Billy went now.

It had been a sad mistake on the mother's part, this withdrawal of herself and family

from all such associations, and it had added to her burden of care and sorrow in a way that she did not fully comprehend until long afterward. With no church-home or church-friends to hold them, the family in that busy city drifted away beyond knowledge and help into an isolation and friendlessness that would otherwise have been impossible, and also into ignorance of the strong refuge of truth and promise that might have brought strength and hope.

So it happened that Susie, listening to Miss Ruey, did not know the promise to which she referred; but presently those words about the Lord's help awakened a memory and a thought:

"When he was on earth he did hear the blind, didn't he? They could go to him then."

"Can yet," interrupted Miss Ruey.

"If he were only here now! if he would ever pass along this street!" thought poor Susie as she made her slow way homeward, coming now, for the first time in her life, to a conscious need of him. It was this feeling that made her take down the old Bible, and

bringing its large print close to the window begin to scan its pages despite her mother's half remonstrance. It could not hurt her eyes, nothing pained them, and she wanted to recall the half-remembered story. It had gained a new interest—not as showing anything that could happen to her, but only something that had been done for others like her, and she could understand now how much it must have meant to them.

There was a strange, sad pleasure in the reading, slow and difficult as it was; and after that, day by day, when the light was clear enough for her to pick out the words, she turned to the stories of those who were healed, picturing it all to herself—the crowded streets, the anxious friends, the pale faces of the stricken ones who had watched so long for this coming. Then the thrill of his touch and voice, and the sudden gladness and adoring gratitude! She could faintly understand what that last might be.

“If Susie could go to New York!” That was the constant burden of thought with the mother, brother and sister. The place that had been offered to Susie in an up-town

store could not be bestowed upon Louise—she was too young—and it was so hard to earn enough for even their most common daily wants that the thought of securing the additional sum required for such a journey seemed almost an impossibility.

Yet Susie *must* go. Even though it were long in coming, the money must some way be earned. Nat began to look about for extra bits of work that could be done at night, and the mother toiled indefatigably.

Louise came to her after an unusually silent day:

“I can’t help you so very much about the sewing, mother.”

“Not so much as you can when you are older and have learned more about it.”

“And if I could get a place somewhere, in some family, I could earn more. You wouldn’t mind?”

“Louise, you couldn’t do it. You are not strong enough.” There was a quick pain in the mother’s voice.

“Something that I could do, something light. You would let me?” questioned the girl eagerly.

For Susie's sake the mother slowly assented, and Louise nodded as if some project in her own mind were settled.

At last there came a morning when, sitting in the broad glow of the sunlight, Susie startled the others by exclaiming at the sudden closing of the shutters: "Why, how strange! They must have blown shut, and I didn't notice any wind. It is dark as night here."

There was one terrible moment of silence; then Louise answered in an awed, hushed voice:

"They are open, Susie."

"Open?" She turned a frightened, unseeing glance to the two faces near her, and stretched out her arms with a bitter cry: "It has come! Oh, mother! mother!"

## CHAPTER III.

### *THE BARCLAYS.*

IT had been snowing all night in the old town and on the rugged mountains beyond—a slow, steady snow, that had silently robed all the landscape in white when Jessie Barclay, standing by a low window, looked out upon it. Within the scene was glowing and warm as summer itself. A cheery fire blazed and sparkled in the grate, lighting up the breakfast-table with its glossy damask, white coffee-cups and pretty old-fashioned silver. Bright roses looked out from the soft green of the carpet, sunny pictures gleamed on the walls, and flowering plants and trailing vines filled the wide south window. But away from these familiar beauties Jessie held little Blossom to look out on the snowy street, where ambitious boys were already rolling balls and drawing sleds, her

own gaze meanwhile wandering farther away.

"How beautiful the mountains must look this morning, with the snow bending down the dark evergreens and lying in patches over the rough rocks!" she said, turning to her husband, who was slowly donning his overcoat before the fire. "Even mining will be picturesque this morning, Cade."

"I fear the miners will fail to appreciate it," he answered, rather dryly. "This snow will only look to them like the settling down of winter—a long, cold winter—aggravating the needs of those poor little cabins on the mountains, and making the reduced pay and poorer prospect for work this season a more gloomy outlook than ever."

Jessie's bright face clouded. "It is hard," she said, as with a quick glance around the pleasant room and at her own comfortably-dressed, merry children, she thought of other mothers. "I forget it sometimes, though I should not."

"I did not mean that. You cannot take all burdens upon your own shoulders, little woman," he answered, smiling gravely down

into her tender, earnest eyes as she came to his side. "I would forget it oftener myself, if I could, since I cannot help it."

"But you think it might be helped, that much of the hardship and privation could have been avoided, and that it is not necessary for the upper shaft to lie idle long?" she questioned.

"Mr. Leavitt says it is, and as he really controls the company, and has by far the largest amount of capital invested, he ought to know. There is water in the upper shaft, and various repairs are needed, so that it will cost a considerable sum to put it in running order. Mr. Leavitt insists that it would be folly to expend so much on it now, since the fall shipping is nearly over and the lower shaft can readily supply the winter demand—that it will be far more profitable to allow it to lie idle until spring."

"But you do not think so, Cade?"

"I am only the overseer of the mines, Jessie, not an owner. The money does not pass into or out of my pockets, and I cannot say what view I might take of the matter if I were in his place," he answered slowly.

"You do not agree with him, though; I know you do not," she persisted.

"No. Aside from all consideration for the miners and their families, I think it would pay better to work both shafts; and I have told him so, but he naturally prefers his own judgment to mine on that subject."

"I don't see why he should, when you are on the ground all the time, understand the business thoroughly, and know all its workings practically, while he only drives out now and then in his carriage, looks about for an hour, and really knows nothing about it," she exclaimed indignantly.

Her husband laughed: "If you were Mr. Leavitt, how easily I could manage matters to suit myself! As I said before, my dear, he furnishes the money. But I think he is making a mistake," he continued, thoughtfully. "I do not believe it will be profitable, even financially, to have what work there is done by ill-paid, discontented men, working half-heartedly and brooding over their hardships, and to have about the shaft so many other men entirely idle all the winter. Foreigners most of them are, rough

and ignorant, who will not understand the cause of the trouble, but will feel themselves wronged, and grow bitter and desperate, blaming everybody and everything indiscriminately, I'm afraid, after their blind fashion. Poor souls! I pity them, but I can't do much to help them."

"And they often blame you too, I suppose?" said Jessie half questioningly.

"I suppose so, sometimes: it is natural. I have to hear their complaints without saying much, you know; I cannot condemn the course of the company to them, and to some of them the 'Boss' represents almost unlimited power. The men down at the wharf, those who do the lading, are of a somewhat different sort—more intelligent, but I cannot say that they are better. They are generally the talkers and ringleaders in all that goes on, and— By the way, Jessie, we have a new enterprise started on the mountain lately—a large cabin, built and furnished for a drinking-saloon. I suspect that business will flourish even in these dull times."

"Oh, Cade, what a shame! As if poverty, scant work and poor pay were not bad

enough, without their spending what little they do earn in that way, and robbing their families of the last cent! Could no one have hindered it?"

"I do not suppose there was much effort to do so. When Mr. Leavitt learned of it he merely said that a warm, bright room where they could crowd together was about the only enjoyment they knew, and if they drank there it was no more than they were sure to do somewhere; so he didn't know that it was worth while to object to the place. Perhaps he thought objections would not avail anything, and that stronger measures might arouse resentment among the miners themselves. Perhaps he really did not care; I do not know. At any rate, the cabin has been erected, and the new sign was swung out yesterday."

"And it will make everything worse than before. Those poor wives and mothers!" said Jessie sadly.

"What difference it will make remains to be seen. As Mr. Leavitt says, they will drink, many of them, wherever they have to go for it. I fear it more now because there

is so much enforced idleness. However, we must wait and see. You haven't once reminded me of your favorite proverb about 'not crossing a bridge till one comes to it;' and the winter may not prove so hard, after all," he concluded more lightly as he noticed his wife's troubled look. "We will do the best we can for them, Jessie, and then we must leave the rest. Now bring Blossom to the piazza to wave me good-bye. I should have been off before this time, instead of loitering to burden you with my worries and vexations."

"*Ours*," corrected Jessie with a tender smile that claimed her share in whatever came to him.

A pretty picture she made, standing on the piazza with the baby's golden head leaning against her brown one, a scarlet shawl thrown around them both, and her four boys clustering at her feet—a sweet picture of home love and comfort—Cade Barclay thought, looking back as he mounted his horse to ride away, and calling to her by the name he often gave when he saw her in the midst of her small kingdom:

“Good-bye, Queenie.”

A chorus of good-byes answered, followed by a parting volley of snow-balls—no one of which reached the gate—from the ardent but inexpert quartette on the steps.

Another had glanced at the group admiringly—a young girl walking slowly up the street; and as the horseman rode away she unfastened the gate and entered, making her way half up the walk unnoticed while the mother was laughingly directing her rosy marksmen to “take the old apple tree for a target and try again.”

“Somebody coming,” said little Rob, suddenly pausing with ball upraised.

Thus announced, the girl drew near.

“Do you know of any one who needs help—a nursery-girl?” she asked.

Mrs. Barclay laughed.

“I do look as if I ought to know, surely,” she said with a glance at her rollicking band.

“I keep some one to help me with these little people usually, but I have no one now. Are you used to the care of children?”

“No’m.”

“I thought you looked too young to have

had much experience. It is entirely new work, then? Do you think you would like it? Do you like children?"

"I don't know." The girl seemed pausing to consider the subject. "I do not know any children well except my own little brother. I love him, of course," she answered slowly, with simple honesty.

"And what is your name?"

"Louise Sheldon."

"Well, Louise"—the lady hesitated a moment, but the face with its grave, dark eyes attracted her—"I do need help. The work is light, but it requires a girl who is kind, patient and obliging to be of much use with little children. You may try the place if you wish. You cannot tell what you can do anywhere until you *do* try."

The serious eyes brightened a little, but Louise answered briefly,

"Thank you. I'll go home and let my mother know, and come back right away, if you please."

"Have I done an unwise thing," Mrs. Barclay wondered, watching the retiring form, "in engaging so hastily a girl of whom I know

nothing?" Her hands had been entirely too full in the week that had elapsed since good-natured Norah had left "to go to school wid the sisters, an' get a bit of larnin'," but she had not thought of supplying the departed student's place except by careful inquiry and upon good recommendation. She had acted impulsively, certainly; but foolishly? She was not sure of that. She relied much upon her own reading of a face, and, moreover, she was not a mother to trust her children wholly to any care apart from her own supervision. She needed some one to amuse them, to attend to the countless little wants that cost so many steps, and to take Baby Blossom for her daily airing; but usually the girl would be under her own watchful eye.

"And some one must give her a first chance," she said, concluding her mental review.

Louise returned promptly, her face not betraying that tears had fallen upon it with her mother's kiss, and that she had turned it resolutely away from her home and had not dared to look back at the window

where poor Sue sat listening to the receding steps, but not seeing the retreating figure. She went quietly about her new duties, adapting herself to them readily.

A wondrously still, sober maiden Mrs. Barclay thought her as the day wore on, noticing that, though quick, patient and attentive, all the children's games did not wile her into talk or laughter.

She did not dream how heavy the young heart was, nor how drearily homesick it grew as the evening shadows deepened and night fell. Poor child! it was her first night away from home, and the thought of many long nights to come made her courage falter. She was so lonely in the pretty room, with the happy mother and the merry children watching for their father to come. She so longed to be again in the homely little sitting-room—to see her mother's face, to get the supper for Nat. Oh, how could she ever do without them all?

“It's for Sue's sake, for Sue's sake!” she whispered again and again to herself to nerve her sinking spirits; but when she laid her head upon her pillow the thought of Sue

occupying their little room alone brought to her eyes the hot tears that at last she could shed unnoticed.

With the morning, bright and sunny, the prospect seemed not nearly so unendurable. The work was light, Mrs. Barclay and the children pleasant, and she was earning money for them all at home—money so sorely needed now. No, she must not waver in her resolution. And she assisted in dressing the children and carried Baby Blossom about with such readiness and earnest effort to please that Mrs. Barclay began to congratulate herself upon her new acquisition.

Slowly four days passed—the longest of days they seemed to Louise—and then she asked leave to go home. The request was granted at once, and she hurried out and along the street as if her feet could not bear her fast enough.

“Louise’s step,” said Susie, already growing quick to distinguish sounds, now that she must depend so much upon them for whatever knowledge came to her.

“Louise! Louise!” echoed Billy, springing forward to meet her.

How sweet it was to see them all! She dropped into a chair with a sigh of satisfaction, and looked hungrily about the room and at the dear faces as if she had been famishing for a sight of them. They gathered about her with eager questions, and she told them of her work, of the house, its mistress and the children; only answering their questions, however, not talkative even then; that would not have been Louise. Of her homesick longing to see them all she said nothing beyond the one little sentence that burst forth impetuously:

“It has seemed a month since I went away!”

The mother's face lost something of its anxious look as she talked. She had so feared the girl might meet unkindness or be required to work beyond her strength—had doubted whether it had been right to allow her to go; only that in their circumstances she had not known how to oppose.

“And mother has something to show you. A letter, a real letter to her, with— No, I won't tell what was in it,” said Billy, stopping himself suddenly in the midst of his

eager narrative, lest he should spoil a surprise.

Letters to any of them were rare—her mother had not received one for years—and Louise looked up wonderingly.

“It does seem strange,” said the mother, bringing the letter from a drawer where it had been carefully laid away. “It is from my old home, from a lawyer there—some one I do not know, the place and people have changed so in all these years. But they were settling up the estate of some man there, and among the claims against it they found a small one of my father’s. Probably it was something forgotten long ago, as my parents have been dead for years; but it has come to light now, and they have sent the amount to me. ‘A small sum,’ the lawyer called it, but fifteen dollars seems considerable to us. We will lay this aside for—something;” she nodded toward Susie. “How strange it seems! I feel almost as if it were something my father had sent me,” she added, smoothing the letter with a sort of wistful tenderness.

Fifteen dollars! That seemed to Louise a

grand beginning in their effort to accumulate for Susie, and her hope and courage rose proportionately. Then Nat came home, and she had a few minutes' chat with him. He told her of his success in finding odd bits of overwork, and also that he thought it best they should write at once to Dr. S—— and learn his terms, so that they could tell how much it would cost for Susie's stay in New York. Altogether, Louise was greatly cheered—and stimulated too—in her determination to help them all.

“Don't get so in love with that grand house that you won't want to come back to ours,” Nat said, walking to the corner with her when she went away.

“Little danger,” she answered briefly.

Nevertheless, it was not so hard to go back. Home did not seem so far away, now that she had seen them all; she realized what she had known before, yet could not feel in her new, strange circumstances—that she was not entirely separated from her family; that a few minutes' walk would take her to them, and she could see them at any time. The sense of loneliness diminished, and she grew

more content and cheerful, while the thought of the money already laid aside for Sue made her own earnings appear more valuable, and the object for which she was working less distant. Her quiet, steady manner won the children, and she began to care for them in return, and to find as the days went by that her duties grew more natural and less irksome.

“A bad drunken man! Look, Weeze!” cried little Robbie, standing beside her at the window one day.

Josey, Karl and Willie crowded up at once to watch the man, who, with bent head and hat drawn low over his face, went staggering from one side of the walk to the other. Louise knew that reeling figure well—she had seen it only too often—but she did not avow her recognition as, with head turned away and cheek almost resting on Baby Blossom’s golden hair, she listened while the mother explained to her little band the danger and sin of intemperance and the shame and pain it wrought. Louise could have preached a more effective sermon from personal experience, but she sat with

close-shut lips, uttering neither word nor comment. A strange, rather unimpressible girl, not easily touched or interested, Mrs. Barclay thought even while she talked.

Yet, in truth, since she had been in this home Louise was beginning to understand more clearly than ever before how the one evil had darkened her own home—that poverty, hardship and care need not have been theirs but for that. She began to cherish too a hope, growing out of the beauty and comfort she saw around her, that happier days might possibly come. She was no dreamer, but she sometimes counted her prospective earnings in this work, to which she was growing reconciled, and whispered to herself, “It will help; and if Susie can only be cured I wouldn’t mind staying on; and then, all together, we can do better and get a great many things. Maybe it will not be so hard for mother and all of us much longer.”

In one of her brief visits at home she learned that they had heard from Dr. S——, and the cost of Susie’s going to New York for treatment would be less than they had

feared. The doctor, surmising from the anxious, careful inquiries of their letter something of the story they did not tell, had made his own terms very low. There would be traveling and some other expenses, but if Susie could have fifty dollars it might answer. Even that seemed a large sum to them, knowing the slow way in which it must be gathered, but not wholly unattainable, and they worked for it hopefully.

Of the planning and hoping they said nothing to the husband and father. It would have been useless, they thought—or, more truly, they did not think of it at all. It was long since they had included him in any of the household councils, or regarded him as possessing any share in its interests. He never spoke of Susie's eyes now in his irregular homecomings; he seemed to have grown accustomed to and careless of her affliction, as he had done of so many other things.

Louise saw him pass occasionally, wondering what attracted him so often to the suburbs and up the mountain-road toward the mines. One morning, out with the children

for their daily airing, she met him. He was not himself, or he would have passed her in sullen silence, feeling, perhaps, some shame or a passing twinge of remorse at her position. As he was sufficiently intoxicated to render him oblivious of any such sentiment, he stopped her:

“Eh, Louise! Glad to see—dear girl. This fine day, eh?”

“Yes; I must go on with the children,” said Louise hurriedly.

“Fine children! inn’cence and halcyon days of childhood! Stop and lemme see ’em,” pursued her father, steadying himself against a post, while the little boys watched him in astonishment and some alarm. “Nice children! Who’s owner of ’em?”

“They are Mrs. Barclay’s, and I am taking care of them for her. I must go.”

“Louise, my dear, you’ll earn a good deal of money. Lend your father a dollar or so?”

He staggered back a pace, and Louise hastily pushed her little flock forward and passed on, quickening her steps until she had turned a corner out of his sight. She took a long walk that day, and tried to interest the



Louise in trouble.



children in various objects around them, that they might forget the scene; but, after all, Robbie, the chatterbox of the party, remembered to tell a confused story of "some big drunken man that stopped Weeze and talked to her."

Mrs. Barclay asked no questions, but she wondered, a little suspiciously, at the girl's silence.

Louise tried to keep watch after that and avoid all chance of a meeting, and for a week she saw no more of her father. Then, one sunny day, returning with the children, she met him near Mrs. Barclay's gate, and again he stopped her and renewed his request for money:

"Lend your father a trifle, like a 'fectionate daughter; I'm in pressing circumstances."

"I have no money—not a single cent," answered Louise earnestly.

"You get it from the lady, for—valu'ble services," he persisted. "Go 'n' ask her. I'll take care of the baby;" and he attempted to take possession of Blossom's carriage, which Louise had been drawing.

"No, no, I cannot," said Louise in distress.

"Yes—can get some for your father. I'll hold the baby," he urged, bending over as if to lift the child in his arms; but at the movement and his strange face little Blossom raised her voice in a shrill cry, and with a sudden motion Louise whirled the carriage away from her father, pushed by him and entered the gate.

From her window Mrs. Barclay had witnessed the encounter, and trembled with alarm as she saw the rough-looking, evidently intoxicated stranger stop the party and attempt to possess himself of her child. She sprang to the door to find Louise already coming up the walk, but instead of the frightened recital of adventure she expected, the girl was silent.

"Why, Louise, who was that man?"

"My father," Louise answered after an instant's scarcely perceptible hesitation.

She said nothing more, she could think of nothing to say, but passed on with the child in her arms.

The children, however, supplemented the story.

“The man wanted money, and Weeze hadn’t any. He told her to go get some, and he said he’d take Baby; and then Weeze jerked the carriage away and ran through the gate,” they said.

A drunken father, who was in the habit of meeting the girl and demanding money, and who had threatened to seize the baby if his demands were not complied with! Mrs. Barclay was in consternation at such a state of affairs. He might be more successful another time, and run away with the child in the hope of extorting money, or, in his drunken madness, kill it. What was to prevent his coming to the house if Louise were at any time left in charge of the children? However kind the girl herself might be, she could never feel safe to trust the little ones with her again. She had done an unwise thing in engaging one of whom she knew nothing, and she must end the matter as speedily as possible. She could not risk her baby’s life—dear little Blossom!

So that afternoon, when, according to previous arrangement, Louise was going home for a little while, the lady placed some money

in her hand and said, reluctantly, but still with full determination to end the matter,

“There is payment for your work, Louise. The month ends to-day, you know, and I am sorry, but I think I shall not need you any longer. I would have told you sooner if I had known, and since I have changed my mind so suddenly it is only just that I should pay you for a week or two in advance, so that you can have opportunity to find another place without loss. I am very sorry that it has happened so.”

She did not give any reason for the abrupt change in her plans.

Louise did not ask any; she understood at once. Briefly, but very positively, she declined payment for anything more than the actual term of service rendered, and then gathered up her few effects without a word. A flood of bitter thoughts was surging through her heart as she walked slowly homeward with a step unlike the quick, springing one with which she usually turned in that direction; but she only murmured a single sentence to herself:

“Poor Sue!”

## CHAPTER IV.

### *AT HOME AGAIN.*

SOMETHING in that silent, unquestioning departure touched Mrs. Barclay. Her course had seemed only wise and necessary to her excited, troubled thought, but when Louise was really gone she began to reconsider her decision with an uncomfortable feeling that it had been hasty.

“Why don’t Weeze come?” asked Robbie, with his rosy lips close to the window-pane, as the twilight deepened into darkness in the street.

“Louise isn’t coming back again. You must help mamma take care of Blossom, and pick up all these playthings,” answered his mother, trying to divert him from his watching.

“Why won’t she? I like Weeze. Don’t you want her to live here any more?” pur-

sued Robbie, more desirous of information than of any new duties.

“Yes, I did like Louise, but I could not have her miserable father stopping her in the street and threatening to run off with the baby. I really could not risk such a thing as that.”

Mrs. Barclay replied more to the vague discomfort of her own thoughts than to the child. But after a moment's slow pondering Robbie gathered her meaning, and having announced a valorous determination to “frow stones” at any one who should attempt to steal the baby, a sudden thought struck him.

“Mamma, he didn't say run away with Blossom,” he explained; “he said *hold* her and Weeze go and get some money.”

It might have been so, but that did not insure safety to her child in the arms of a man crazed with liquor; and who could tell what his maddened brain might suggest? No, she could not risk such contact, Mrs. Barclay assured herself. Yet—he had children of his own! She remembered pityingly the little brother Louise had mentioned

when she first came, whom she “loved, of course.” Perhaps it was for his sake she had been working. Doubtless there was some need of her earnings in such a home as that father would make. Poor girl! it was hard that through no fault of her own, but only because of her wretched father, she must lose the place she had striven so faithfully to keep—lose it for the very reason that made her need of employment most urgent.

As she began to view the subject from another side than her own, Jessie Barclay’s generous heart grew more and more self-reproachful. She had been selfish, unjust. She might, at least, have questioned the girl and learned all the facts in the case—have assured herself that there was really so much cause for alarm or no other way of avoiding trouble.

“But I thought only of myself, and not at all of her. How cruel she must have thought me!—Ah, Blossom darling! if coming years could ever place you in a position like hers, I should hope for different treatment for you from any Christian mother,”

she murmured penitently, with her cheek on her child's sunny head.

She missed the willing, patient hands all the next day and for many a day thereafter, but the trouble of any additional care or personal inconvenience was far out-weighted by regretful thoughts of what seemed now like selfishness and injustice. She would gladly have sought the girl, but did not know her address—not even in what part of the city she lived. The silent, uncommunicative Louise had volunteered no information, scarcely a remark, concerning her family. Mrs. Barclay had thought of it sometimes—when Louise was out with the children, perhaps, or when she was herself busy—had meant to learn more concerning her, to try to win her confidence when some convenient opportunity should offer. But the days had brought their duties, a whole month had passed, and now it was too late! It was the old story, finding its way to all human lips so often: “While thy servant was busy here and there the man was gone.”

“Lives meet and part so strangely like ships at sea, and we so often forget what we

should have given or received until we are far on our different courses," Jessie Barclay said to her husband. "We think of the kindness that might have been done when the opportunity is gone; we forget the cup of cold water until the thirsty lips have passed by."

For weeks the thought lingered with her, and she scanned every girlish figure she met in the street with the hope of seeing Louise. She began to make frequent visits to the mountain in those early winter weeks, passing up the rough road—not attracted alone by the wild beauty of rocks or evergreens, or by the fine view of city and river below, but pressing on to where the little cabins sprang up here and there or nestled in clusters of three or four together. She was trying to learn something of them, to become acquainted with their inmates, in a gradual, unobtrusive way, that she might know where and how to help the poor mothers and children if help should be needed.

There was no lack of poverty surely, its effects increased, in many cases, by ignorance and indolence, while in others, as one woman

rather curtly told her, they "had nothing, and made the best of it." It was slow work to establish really friendly relations, to learn how to offer assistance that would be neither resented nor abused—neither offend honest independence nor arouse cupidity in the unworthy. But it did not take long to discover need and privation, and to see that there would be more as the winter wore on. Jessie Barclay's purse was not limitless—she was ready to wish it were as she grew more acquainted with the little mountain homes—but she could help many a little one to warmer winter clothing and provide some delicacies for the sick.

Despite the general dullness, the new saloon flourished, thriving on slaughter and death after the manner of vultures. A long rough cabin it was, with low door and small windows, swinging out a gaudily-painted sign—"Mountaineers' Rest."

"Rest of their money and rest of their sense! Very 'propriate name!" muttered a man in half-bitter, half-drunken comment as Mrs. Barclay was passing one day. As he made his way, not quite steadily, into the

building, it occurred to her that somewhere she had seen him before. She rarely forgot a face or form once seen, and a moment's thought recalled Louise's father. She could seek no information from him there and in that condition, and she walked slowly on, thinking how vainly she had hoped to meet the girl.

“‘Ne’er returns the chance that passed;  
That one moment was its last;  
Never more its countenance  
Beams upon thy slow advance;  
Never more that time shall be  
Burden-bearer unto thee;  
Woe and want must cry in vain—  
Lost chance never comes again,’”

she repeated regretfully.

The time had been a weary, troubled one to Louise. Much as she had missed her home, she could not be content to remain in it now and give up the hope of earning and helping that had grown so dear to her. The disappointment the others felt in the loss of her place, too, made it harder to bear, though they tried for her sake not to betray it.

“I am very sorry, dear, but it was no fault

of yours," her mother said. But her very tone revealed her own sadness and discouragement—grieved not more for the result than for the cause that had wrought it.

Nat whistled incessantly to show how lightly he esteemed the matter, and how exceedingly cheerful and untroubled he was, his very effort to hide being most convincing proof that there was something to be hidden.

"Never mind, sis; something else will turn up. As good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," he said, anxious to brighten Louise's sober face.

"That doesn't help us any, so long as our hook and line won't catch them," she answered.

She walked the streets with tired feet many an hour, trying vainly to find employment—seeking some place of which she had heard or inquiring where she thought there might possibly be a chance. That part of the city in which the Barclays lived she carefully avoided. Since her father had for some reason acquired a habit of frequenting it, any situation there, if she could obtain one, would be useless, she thought. The same

scene would be re-enacted; he would meet and speak to her, and she would soon be sent away. So it happened that in all the long walks Mrs. Barclay never saw her.

Her mother's feeling, that there was not room enough in the world, often came to the girl in those days, there seemed so many eager, ready hands for all the work. Passing homeward from her weary, unsuccessful quest one day, she neared the large house whose windows she had so often watched from the one in her own little room.

"I wonder if there could be any chance here? They take enough out of homes like mine; they ought to give something in return," she muttered; and, with a sudden impulse born of desperation, she mounted the broad steps and rang the bell.

The door was opened immediately by a girl about Louise's own age. Just returned from school, her hat and armful of books said and explained why the bell was answered so promptly, and not by a servant. The pretty street-dress with its soft trimmings, the white, girlish hands with their glitter of rings, the dainty boots, the handsome hall

and richly-carpeted stairs,—Louise's swift glance swept them all, forming in her own mind some sharp contrasts even while she stated, as concisely as possible, her errand. Did they need any help? had they any work for her?

“No; we have all the help we need. Mamma doesn't wish to engage any one else,” was answered, not unkindly, only carelessly.

The door received a hasty push as Louise turned, but it remained slightly ajar, and she caught a sentence, uttered, probably, to some companion in an adjoining room:

“We never would engage any one from the street, anyway.”

“Particular—about some things,” commented Louise as she walked away. “They don't take people from the street, only turn them into it.”

That she had no references from former places to offer, no experience of which to boast, secured in some quarters her prompt refusal; and unconsciously she injured her own cause with her brief replies and uncommunicativeness. At last she abandoned her

efforts, as, for the time at least, useless, and when more plain sewing came to her mother, she assisted as well as she could with that, while she waited for something more promising.

The fund for Susie increased but slowly. Nat's "extras," as he called them, were uncertain and irregular. Often he could obtain nothing beyond his usual daily work, and from that and the small sum the sewing brought it was hard to lay aside anything.

"If I could only help!" Susie said sometimes, passing her hand wistfully over the fabrics she could not see; and Louise, glancing up at the sightless eyes, made her needle fly still more swiftly. Susie must go to New York, but it would take so long to earn the money! Even with the check that had been sent her mother, the payment for her own one month of service, and all that Nat could do, they had secured but little more than two-thirds of the required sum; and now there were no more grand letters to expect, and she had lost her place!

Louise was musing over it despondently one day, carrying home some work for her

mother, when her eyes were attracted by a shop-window near her, and a sudden thought came to her. She paused as if to enter the place, but recollecting the bundle she carried—that it must be delivered in proper time to its owner—she turned away again, but with quickened feet, hurrying every step of the way in her eagerness to accomplish her errand and return before it grew late.

“For I will try more than once; if they will not buy there, I will go somewhere else. I’m sure I can do it somewhere,” she said to herself as she threaded her way through the streets, already growing crowded with people returning from business.

She was not long delayed. The person she sought was at home, the work she delivered satisfactory, and in a few minutes she was free to carry out her hastily-formed project. Curls, braids and waving tresses of black, gold and gray met her eye as she returned to the window that had so attracted her, and again she paused for a moment to look at them. Then she entered, and, asking to examine some of them more closely, inquired their prices. A young girl so

plainly attired was an unpromising customer for that sort of wares, the saleswoman evidently thought, for she eyed her visitor curiously, while she replied to her questions in a half-civil, half-indifferent way.

But Louise soon obtained what she was seeking—some knowledge of the value placed upon the different kinds and qualities of the articles, and then she ventured upon her real errand. Did they purchase hair as well as sell it? Would they buy hers? And she threw aside her hat, only her trembling fingers betraying her nervous haste and excitement. The woman looked at her wonderingly, hesitated, then summoned the proprietor; and presently Louise was seated in a back room, with her hair falling unbound about her. It was her one beauty—long, thick and fine—and the quick eyes of the dealer lighted with satisfaction as they rested upon it.

Terms were speedily agreed upon, the bright, circling shears did their work swiftly also, and the severed tresses lay in a soft, wavy mass upon the floor. Louise did not glance at them. The saleswoman good-

naturedly offered her a peep at the mirror, but it was declined with a word, and drawing her hat closely down on her head and tying a thick veil over it, she lingered only long enough for the money—eighteen dollars—to be placed in her hand.

“A good bargain!” nodded the saleswoman as the shop door closed upon the girl’s departure.

“I’ve got it! enough for Susie!” Louise whispered as she hurried homeward with the precious roll tightly clasped in her cold fingers. “How I must look! It’s no matter, though. I’d have waited to ask mother first, only I know she couldn’t refuse when it’s for Sue; and she’ll feel better not to know till it’s done.”

Her congratulation and explanation found ready expression to herself alone. They obtained but disjointed and partial utterance in the home-circle, when, as she threw aside her wrappings, little Billy drew general attention to her:

“Louise Sheldon, you look just like a boy! What is the matter with your head?”

“Her head?” the mother repeated, look-

ing up wonderingly, and then surveying her in amazement.—“My child, what have you done with your hair?”

“I—had it cut off.”

“Had it cut?” echoed Susie. “Your hair? Why, Louise, what freak possessed you?”

“Long hair is a trouble sometimes, and—they pay for such things, you know,” she added, hastily dropping the little roll of bills into her mother’s lap.

The mother understood then. She carefully smoothed out the crumpled bits of paper that meant so much, her eyes slowly filling as she did so, and drawing the poor shorn head to her bosom kissed it without a word. Susie, after a moment’s wondering thought, comprehended also, and, making her way to her sister’s side, passed her hands over the short locks.

“Your pretty hair, Louise!” she said regretfully.

“It took so long to comb it,” began Louise valiantly again; and then Billy unconsciously came to her relief.

“My!” he ejaculated, running his fingers

through his tangled yellow curls. "I'd sell every spear of mine for that—smack, smooth, shaved off!"

In the laugh this earnestness aroused Louise escaped to her room, and there she ventured to survey herself in the little mirror—to brush her closely-shingled hair into more becoming order, and "get used to it," as she said, swallowing a lump in her throat while she assured herself that she looked "like a fright; and it wasn't worth making a fuss about. And I'm so glad for Sue!" she concluded.

Glad for her they all were, and the talk that evening was hopeful and cheerful as they gathered around the fire. Dr. Ainsley had spoken so confidently of the probable benefit of her going to New York; and now the money so longed and worked for was obtained—really, now, even more than the requisite sum. All assured themselves of that by careful counting, since it seemed almost too good to be true; and then the money was slipped into the drawer of the mother's work-table—a tiny, upper drawer seldom used, where reposed a few household

trinkets—a battered old silver watch, long past any timekeeping, and a pearl-inlaid snuff-box that had belonged to Mrs. Sheldon's grandmother in the days when both the snuff and the grandmother were fashionable.

Then they began to plan details of the journey. They must try to find some one about to take the trip who would take charge of Susie. Dr. Ainsley could doubtless help them there; and in the few days they might be obliged to wait for that Sue's slender wardrobe must be put in the best order attainable. It required not a little anxious thought to arrange that last when so very few articles could be purchased, and they lingered long, suggesting and studying, before they separated for the night.

Even at that late hour Louise's brain was too full of busy thought to yield readily to slumber, and when, at last, her planning was beginning to mingle confusedly with dreaming, a sound below stairs started her wakefulness again, and she raised her head from her pillow to listen.

"It's father," said Susie in answer to the

movement. "Don't you hear? It's the side door, and you know he always has the key of that."

Yes, that unsteady, staggering entrance was unmistakably her father's. Louise listened to the shuffling step as it moved hither and thither, wishing it would cease and its owner grow quiet for the night. His home-comings were irregular, and the moods in which he came various. He was seldom very ill-tempered or abusive. Sometimes he was too nearly stupefied to do more than drop down upon lounge or floor and sink into a heavy slumber, while at others his head was full of grand schemes and impossible projects that he was desirous of expatiating upon. But to-night there was surely no one to whom he could talk, and Louise wondered at his fumbling about, and questioned what he could be busying himself with so long. At last she heard the outer door open and close again, and the step, hurried but unsteady, on the sidewalk.

"He's gone away again!" she exclaimed, starting up once more and listening until the sounds died away in the distance.

“Now he will not come back to-night. Oh dear! I wonder why he came at all, when he didn’t mean to stay?”

Then, with an uneasy thought that he might have left the door unfastened, she slipped softly down stairs, locked it and returned to her room.

After that the household was undisturbed until morning, but then a sickening revelation met them. The little drawer was wide open and rifled of its precious contents! There was no need to ask how or by whom; they all knew but too well—knew also that it was gone beyond all possibility of recovery. The most careful search revealed not a single dollar of the sum so carefully accumulated. The very care they had taken to place it in safety had resulted in the loss. Something—the display of a timepiece by a companion, perhaps—had suggested to David Sheldon’s befogged brain the old watch in the drawer at home, and with some confused idea of rendering it valuable or bartering it he had made search for it, and found, besides, the money. He was too much intoxicated to feel any surprise at discovering

such an amount in the possession of his impoverished family, or any hesitation in appropriating it; he only clutched it eagerly and went away, chuckling to himself over his rare fortune.

That night Louise looked with despairing bitterness at the great glittering windows opposite.

"Shine on!" she said. "You have poor Sue's eyes now, with all the other things that have gone to make up your light."

## CHAPTER V.

### *LITTLE TONY.*

**B**ILLY was meditating. He sat on the front steps, his elbows resting on his knees, his hands covering his ears to protect them from the cold, and his eyes fixed upon the sidewalk. Another small person approaching from around the corner paused to look at him :

“What you doing there, Billy Sheldon?”

Billy raised his eyes and surveyed her seriously—a little girl in ragged dress, with an old shawl wrapped about her and a dilapidated hood tied over the black hair that was flying in uncombed freedom. He had seen her frequently loitering about in the neighborhood, sometimes joining the other children, but oftener alone, and, after a moment's scrutiny, he asked,

“What's your name?”

“Tony.”

“I don’t believe it,” answered Billy impolitely but positively; “that’s a boy’s name.”

“It’s mine too; any way, that’s what Peg Flaherty calls it, and she whips me oftener than anybody else—when she can catch me.”

There was a mischievous dancing in the bright black eyes, which seemed to indicate that the last-mentioned feat was attended with difficulty. But having cited such indubitable proof of Mistress Flaherty’s knowledge in the matter of her name, she returned to her first question:

“What makes you sit here?”

“I’m thinking,” said Billy gravely.

“What about?”

“About how I wish there wasn’t any rum or whisky, and nobody could ever get any more such things to drink for ever and ever,” he answered with slow emphasis.

“My!” Tony looked at him in astonishment. “Wouldn’t some folks be mad! What do you wish that for?”

“’Cause I do. It makes folks wicked, and

not buy their boys and girls any clothes, and steal money too, so it does!"

"Folks don't know what they do when they're drunk," said Tony with an air of one familiar with the subject. "Of course they tear 'round and break things. They're crazy."

"Well, they wouldn't be if they didn't drink, and they couldn't drink if folks didn't sell it," answered Billy with conclusive logic; "and I just wish there wasn't any such places anywhere in the world—that's what!"

"I know where there's ever so many," said Tony reflectively. "They're all lighted up at night, and I've peeped in one and seen 'em selling. They make lots of money."

"They oughtn't to, any way, for the men that pay it ought to buy shoes for their boys and girls and clothes for their mothers; and sometimes other folks earn it besides, and want to pay the doctor with it," said Billy, not quite clear in his statement, but entirely so in the sharp, cruel memory that had made his young heart sore.

Tony glanced down at her own tattered attire. Perhaps a dim thought of some possible connection between the lighted saloons she had admired and her forlorn condition occurred to her for the first time, but she did not ponder it long.

"My father goes there too," she said, taking Billy's position for granted, "but I don't care. I wish he'd stay all the time, for he can't knock me 'round when he's away, and Peg Flaherty isn't so bad, 'cause she has the rheumatiz a good deal and can't run. I don't mind the s'loons," she added grandly, "but if *you* don't like 'em—"

"I just hate every one!" interrupted Billy emphatically.

"Well, then, I'll plague 'em 'most to death, see if I don't!" declared Tony.

"How?"

"Never mind; I know how. Just come along and I'll show you. Won't it be fun?" and Tony's eyes danced again. "Come."

She caught her little companion's hand, and, half reluctantly, half curiously, he accompanied her. Around a corner, up one street and down another, Tony led the way,

as if familiar with the ground, and pausing when, in the late afternoon, lights already gleamed out above the screens at the windows.

“Don’t mean folks shall see in, but I will;” and, whisking about like a squirrel, she perched herself where she could catch a momentary glimpse. “Yes, there’s some in there now; just wait.”

A moment later a man entered, leaving the door slightly ajar. That was Tony’s opportunity. She placed her face near the aperture and sang out in a clear, shrill tone,

“Drink your whisky strong and sweet!  
Your folks at home have nothing to eat.”

Then she darted away, and drew Billy out of sight in a doorway.

Some one from the saloon came and looked into the street, and seeing no one went in again and closed the door. Tony grew bolder. She made her way back to her former position, and ventured cautiously to open the door herself.

“Oh, the rumseller’s folks  
Have silks and gold!

And the drunken man's folks  
Go hungry and cold,"

she shouted. Stringing rhymes together seemed wondrously easy to the child, and Billy's words had given her a new thought to use. Again and again she shouted some couplet and ran away, growing more and more delighted as she saw the increased excitement she caused. Even when she was discovered and roughly ordered away, she would have lingered and returned, trusting to the skill and speed acquired in her frequent encounters, but Billy positively refused. As they passed along another street, however, she suddenly stopped before a gilded sign and sent forth another of her singsong exhortations in tones so loud and clear that there was no possibility of its being unheard:

"Here you spend your money for rum :  
You'd better save your children some."

The proprietor of the establishment rushed angrily to the door, and, after a hurried glance up and down the street, perceived the insignificant aggressor, and contented himself with sharply demanding what she wanted there

and bidding her begone. But Tony balanced herself on the curbstone, and the instant his back was turned called out in saucy defiance—

“Such a nice man! he doesn’t care.

He makes men drunk, and they fight and swear,

And leave their poor folks with nothing to wear.

What a nice man!”

Some passer-by stopped and laughed at the scene, and no young *débutante* on stage or platform was ever more flattered by bouquets and applause than Tony by that laughter. She was in nowise disposed to retreat when the irate face appeared again at the door; but Billy, who had fallen back a little, insisted upon going home, and finally drew her away. He was by no means certain that his mother would approve of Tony’s proceedings, and with all his expressed hatred of the traffic he did not quite enjoy this mode of warfare and the attention it attracted.

“Well, you needn’t do it if you don’t want to,” said Tony patronizingly, yielding to what she considered his weakness. “But I mean to tease ’em every time I get a chance.”

“It won’t do any good; they’ll just keep

selling it all the same," said Billy doubtfully.

"Of course," answered Tony in amazement that anything else should be thought of. "Only I just won't give 'em any peace. I didn't ever think before about their taking the money that ought to buy bread and butter and shoes and things, 'r else I'd sung at 'em long ago. Won't they be plagued now, though?"

She nodded her head in satisfaction, and seemed not unlike a little stinging mosquito bent upon tormenting some foe too large to vanquish. Poor Tony! She was not unskilled in that sort of retaliation. Her relations with humanity in general had not been particularly happy. She seemed to have taken a great fancy to little Billy, however, and accompanied him back to his own doorstep, listening interestedly while he told her of Susie.

"Can't see one bit, real true?" she questioned sharply. "'Cause I've seen lots of make-b'lieves; they do it to get money."

"Susie wouldn't do that," said Billy indignantly.

"Well, if I was that way I'd get a real

nice little dog, and let him lead me 'round, so I could sing for folks and get pennies. But I s'pose your sister wouldn't know how, maybe," added Tony with a sort of lofty compassion for such ignorance.

Billy looked at her wonderingly, but they had reached his own home again, and just then his mother came to the door. She looked a little surprised at his odd companion, but asked him no questions, only bade him run over to the store and bring home the loaf of bread for supper.

Tony volunteered to accompany him, and together they entered Miss Hannah's presence. Tony manifested great admiration for the various articles displayed, and moved about here and there examining them, while Billy made his purchase and paused to answer the neighborly inquiries always made. Then she walked quietly out beside him, and when they had crossed the street she drew from under her tattered shawl a large fair orange :

"Here, give this to your blind sister."

Billy took the tempting golden ball with delight :

"How nice! Why, don't you want it yourself, though?" with a sudden glance at her dress and a consciousness that dainties must be rare in her life.

"No; I got it for her," Tony answered grandly, as if bestowing gifts were an everyday affair.

"Did you get it just now at the store?"

Tony nodded.

"You're real good," said Billy gratefully. "I didn't see you buy it."

Tony laughed a strange laugh, that with her look enlightened little Billy's unsuspecting ignorance. His blue eyes opened wide:

"Why, Tony, do you steal?"

"Ho! I didn't take it for myself; it's for her, I tell you," repeated Tony carelessly, as if the manner of disposing of the article entirely canceled any irregularity in the mode of obtaining it.

"'Twas stealing, Tony. It's awful bad to steal," said Billy impressively.

"Why?" asked Tony.

"'Cause it is; and they put folks in jail for it," answered Billy, not familiar with any

higher reason, but clinging firmly to the home-teaching nevertheless. "Any way, Miss Hannah's real good to us, too—'special-ly Miss Ruey—and I wouldn't take it for anything."

"You didn't," interposed Tony.

"And Susie wouldn't want it; she'd think it was awful mean," pursued Billy, still holding out the orange, which Tony made no motion to take. She leaned against the wall with her arms folded in her ragged shawl, and seemed to consider this a great ado about nothing; but presently she said, with an air of condescending pity for his weak scruples,

"Well, you can take it back to that old store-woman if you want to. I don't care."

"And tell her?" questioned Billy.

"Yes."

Billy looked astounded at the cool proposition. To have such an act discovered was enough to overwhelm one, he thought.

"Why, you won't ever dare come 'round here again if I do."

"Ho! Yes, I will; she couldn't catch me if she tried," laughed Tony.

With another wondering look at her Billy drew a long breath and started slowly across the street again, while Tony called out a careless "good-bye" and walked off in an opposite direction. Billy entered the store hesitatingly, and when Miss Hannah came forward he laid the orange on the counter :

"That girl—Tony—she sent this back."

"Sent it back? She didn't buy it here."

"No'm ; she took it."

"Stole it?" exclaimed Miss Hannah. "The little thief! I never thought what she was poking 'round so for, but I might have known enough to watch her. Well, I do say the street young ones beat all for wickedness!"

"But she sent it back, Hannah," interposed Miss Ruey.

"Sent back that one, but who knows how many more she took?"

Miss Hannah herself knew that no more had been taken ; it required but one glance at the fruit in the window to show her that. She merely asked the question for effect. Her stock in trade was not so large that any article taken could long be unmissed.

Billy made no explanations; he lingered but a minute timidly, and departed.

"There! I might have given him the orange, seeing he took the trouble to bring it back," said Miss Hannah with a sudden thought as the door closed. "Another time will do, though. It's a wonder that light-fingered little tatterdemalion didn't keep it herself. I do say it would be hard getting resigned to have that kind of a child about."

"Sometimes I think," said Miss Ruey slowly, "that we're only too easy resigned to their being all around us, without trying much to help or teach the poor little souls."

Miss Hannah looked over her spectacles at her sister, looked under them at the counter, rattled the fire vigorously, and finally observed, as if it were the conclusion of some unspoken thought,

"But it's not likely she'll ever show herself 'round here again."

Tony, however, had no idea of exciting herself for any such trivial reason. She even felt a passing wish, as she ate her

meagre supper that night, that she had kept the orange for herself, since Billy would not accept it. Tony's suppers were often scant and poor—occasionally she had none at all. Her father brought home what food their larder afforded. Sometimes he cooked it himself, but oftener he sat by, ordering, scolding and swearing in drunken irascibility, while Tony did her best at preparing it. The supply varied according to his mood and the number of stray pence remaining in his pocket after he had satisfied his thirst for liquor. He worked a little, gambled more and drank a great deal. There were only Tony and himself—their home a single room in a corner of Mrs. Flaherty's abode. Sometimes he was away for days together. If the supply of food was tolerably large, Tony viewed these absences with unmixed satisfaction; if provisions were scarce, her gratification was proportionately lessened. Scant fare alone was preferable to more with his company, she thought, but when one was exceedingly hungry it was desirable to have something to eat, even though it was accompanied with

such inconveniences as a flood of invectives and occasional blows.

Tony's domestic duties were limited. She punched up the two miserable beds now and then and straightened their coverings—her own when the fancy seized her, her father's when she feared abuse might result from neglecting it. She swept the floor occasionally if she could borrow Mrs. Mulrooney's broom. Mrs. Mulrooney occupied another room in Mrs. Flaherty's tenement, and Tony sometimes obtained a meal there, in an emergency, as a reward for taking care of Mrs. Mulrooney's baby. Tony rather liked that baby; the feeling of the soft, helpless little hands patting her face was a novel sensation. She went to Mrs. Mulrooney's room now and then just for the sake of holding the baby, even when she expected no payment for the service; and though Mrs. Flaherty was always warning the mother that Tony was not to be trusted with the child, and would "break its neck intirely," this catastrophe had not yet occurred.

Tony and the mistress of the establishment were always at sword-points. Mrs.

Flaherty had a vocabulary of uncomplimentary names that she hurled at Tony whenever she came in her sight. She accused the child as the author of all the mischief done about the premises, and did not hesitate to visit punishment without waiting for proof when she could lay her hands upon her. In return, Tony evinced no little ingenuity in devising safe ways of tormenting Peg Flaherty. She enjoyed the warfare, and it was with something of the satisfaction Alexander might have known in discovering fresh worlds to conquer that she began to view the liquor dealers as lawful enemies.

"I don't mind 'em, but Billy does, and won't I make 'em hop!" she said to herself, stringing a jingle of rhymes together in anticipation of the next day's campaign.

What Billy had said about the money spent with them was a new thought to her, and again that night she looked down at her own miserable dress, and wondered vaguely whether she might have fared any better if her father had not patronized such places so extensively. She did not attempt to answer the question, but contented herself with re-

solves to revenge the wrong she did not fully comprehend. She had ample time to devote to the purpose, for if she did not keep house, neither did the house keep her in any weather in which she could endure to be out. She roamed the streets at will, and succeeded, as the days passed, in making herself an object of annoyance and detestation at numerous saloons and low dramshops of the city, where her shrill mocking voice was heard again and again. She was impartial in her attentions, and bestowed them alike upon establishments glittering with plate-glass and silver and the wretched little places where dingy screens seemed unnecessary in the dingier windows.

Poor untaught, uncared-for little Tony! going blindly upon her self-appointed mission of making liquor-selling uncomfortable, an odd emissary of temperance was she! Yet in her rags, ignorance and forlornness she was herself an unanswerable argument for the cause.

Though she did not attempt to take Billy with her again, she contrived often to make her way to him, and whenever she found him

alone at the gate or on the steps she lingered and talked. One day he was gravely examining the contents of his pockets when she joined him. A piece of string, two marbles, a broken knife, some rusty nails and other kindred treasures lay upon the step beside him. Tony, seating herself near him, spied a bit of bright pasteboard and took it up:

“What’s this?”

“My Sunday-school ticket—last one,” said Billy.

“What’s it for?”

“Why, it’s to learn; it’s got a verse on it, don’t you see? And when you can say that and ever so many more on little cards then you get a big one with a picture on; only I don’t hardly ever get one of them, ’cause I don’t go all the time,” added Billy truthfully.

“Can you read what’s on this?” questioned Tony, studying the pink card.

“Why, yes. Can’t you read, Tony?”

“Some—big letters up on bills, like ‘Circus,’ and ‘Show,’ and such,” said Tony. “I don’t know little, fine reading like this.”

Billy took the ticket and read its text:

“I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.”

Tony pondered a minute:

“What does it mean?”

“Why, it means—it means what it says,” answered Billy, stopping for the first time to consider whether it had any meaning; “that He thinks about poor folks, I guess.”

“What poor folks?” demanded Tony.

“Everybody. It’s the Bible, don’t you know? and that always means everybody,” explained Billy, not feeling very clear upon the subject. “Anyway, ’most always.”

Everybody! And she was “poor and needy” herself. How strange if there should be a thought for her! The idea floated dimly through Tony’s brain. Of God she had a vague knowledge—gathered she scarcely knew where or how—that he had made all things, and was afar off somewhere, great and all-powerful. Her father repeated the name often when he swore at her, and Mrs. Mulrooney used it now and then among her ejaculatory petitions to saint and Virgin when the children were sick or hurt. But that he might be thinking upon

her—that was a new possibility to Tony; she was not quite sure that she should like it all the time, in all her doings.

“Do you s’pose,” she questioned with a sudden thought, “that he don’t like the places where they sell whisky either?”

“No, I’m just sure he don’t. They’re wicked, bad places,” answered Billy, positive in his indignation. “He can’t like anything that’s bad.”

Tony nodded her head; here was a fresh incentive to her new vocation. She looked with envious admiration upon Billy’s wonderful store of knowledge—with a sort of hungry longing too.

“How did you get into that school?” she asked.

“Oh, I just went. Anybody can go that’s a mind to.”

“Me?” said Tony eagerly. “Will you take me ’long with you?”

Billy looked at her and flatly declined:

“You couldn’t go that way, all ragged. I don’t go myself only when I’ve got a whole jacket and everything.”

Tony surveyed her attire and relinquished

the point. She did have a flitting thought of borrowing Peg Flaherty's best shawl—without asking; but success was uncertain; and even if obtained the article would not cover all the tatters.

She trudged away presently, when Billy was called into the house, taking her homeward route in leisurely fashion—now pausing to look in at store-windows, now making a *détour* to give one of her brief but spirited serenades before some marked door, and so reaching at last the narrow stairs that led to her room just as the sun had vanished from sight.

“If He should be thinking on me,” she said to herself as she gathered her bits of fuel together and coaxed them into a blaze before which she could warm her chilled fingers, “maybe—maybe it might be something nice.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE MOUNTAINEERS' REST.*

THE sun was sinking slowly behind the mountain, his last rays lighting up the glittering, coarsely-painted sign of the Mountaineers' Rest. An uninviting harbor of repose the long low room of the cabin looked, despite its promising name. A bar with sloppy trays and sticky glasses decorated one end of the apartment, and at the other was a large stove, red with much heating and untidy with ashes and cinders. The floor between was rough and soiled. A few stiff chairs, two or three small tables and some rude benches completed its furnishing.

On one of these last a man was sitting; he had been lying there in sleep or stupor for hours, but had at last assumed an upright position. He pushed his hat a little

back from his eyes and looked up and down the room and out through the open door to the snowy hillside and the white-crowned evergreens. A heavy hand seemed resting on his heart and brain—a dull, oppressive weight that he could not shake off—while he watched with dim, abstracted gaze what passed around him. Other men came straggling in through the door—roughly-clad, coarsely-spoken, coal-begrimed men, most of them. They all passed up to the bar, and some went out again, while others lingered around the stove. Two or three spoke to him, and he did not answer, but no one seemed to notice the omission.

He felt bewildered, as if awaking from a dream, a dull wonder even, that these should know him, at finding himself among them. Was he like them? did he belong here? “David Sheldon!” He repeated his own name, trying to discover something of himself in it—to recall his own identity by it. It seemed to have a sound of other spots than this, to belong elsewhere.

“Hello, dad! come to life again?” called a rough voice familiarly.

That name cut sharply—unpleasantly too—through his misty thoughts, and awoke at once a clearer consciousness. “Dad!” “Dad Sheldon!” That was the name now, all there was left of it. It was what they called him at street-corners and over card-tables, thick voices shouting it hilariously or muttering it unsteadily. “Dad Sheldon” belonged here, evidently. Yes, and the place was not unfamiliar either; his recognition grew as he studied it again. He had been in it often enough, especially of late, since other more pretentious establishments no longer welcomed him.

“Had a long bout of it this time, eh, dad?”

Had he? It must have been an unusually long one to have left him so confused. He could not remember when he came there, or how. He had a dim recollection of having been possessed of an unusual amount of money, and of visiting some of those respectable saloons, to show them that he was again able to pay for what he ordered; of inviting others to drink with him, and settling the bills with a feeling of lavish wealth; of

playing, winning and losing. That was all he could recall. Even that might be the lingering of some dream or vagary of his clouded brain; probably it was nothing more, he concluded, pondering it a little, for how could he obtain any money?

"Spent yer fortune a'ready, dad, and nothin's left on't?" questioned the last speaker again, with a laugh and a wink at those who stood by the stove.

It had been some crazy fancy of his, then, and his talk of it had furnished amusement for these men! How wretchedly his head ached! how slow and perplexed his thoughts were! He wanted something to steady him, to clear the mists from his brain, and rising slowly he walked over to the counter and asked for something to drink.

"Got money to pay for it?" asked the barkeeper with attempt at jocularly.

"Never mind; you get enough," he answered with suppressed bitterness.

The man laughed, poured out a glass and gave it to him: "We never refuse reg'lar customers, you know."

He drained it feverishly, and walking to

the door stood where the cool, fresh air could strike his face. In a few minutes he grew stronger, his head clearer.

“Wish you’d bring in a bucket of coal, dad; that fire’s low,” said the barkeeper presently.

The words were a request, the tone a command. Services of this sort were expected as a compensation for the liquor furnished when money was wanting, and it was only by virtue of such offices that the supply did not fail here as it had done in other places. David Sheldon knew it—knew too that they contrived to extort payment to the uttermost. The barkeeper’s tone stung him with a sudden keen sense of humiliation, as it had not done before when he was not too besotted to feel or care. Yet he did not resent it; he brought in the coal, and making his way through the knot of men replenished the fire.

“Gettin’ ’round again, dad?—Smart young chore-boy you’ve got, eh, Joe?” This last was addressed in rude jest to the red-faced barkeeper.

“Well, not so lively as some, but then

he's reg'lar and always on hand," responded Joe with a wink.

This brilliant witticism was greeted with a burst of laughter, but the object of it preserved a sombre silence, though again that burning sense of shame smote him. He walked back to the door, and passed through it out into the cold evening air, walking rapidly away, with only the one purpose of escaping for a little while from the eyes and voices within. Why was it that he noticed and felt these things to-night? he wondered. Nay, he did not wonder; it was but a mere pretence of asking himself the question. He knew it was because the long debauch and longer than usual sleep following it had left him, as he rarely was, entirely sober. He did not want to face the answer.

The sun had dropped quite out of sight now, leaving only a fading band of pale gold along the west, and the gray mists were gathering more closely around the mountain. Dreary and cheerless everything looked in that dull light—the snow so white and cold under the trees and upon the rocks, but broken and blackened in the road by pass-

ing wheels and many feet; the dark, cavernous entrance to the mine, and the framework around it standing out gaunt and skeleton-like against the sky. Great black masses of coal lay here and there, and in close proximity were rough, heavy cars for conveying it away. Slate, pieces of lumber and broken implements were scattered over the frozen ground, and among them stood the coal-offices, small, grimy and weather-stained.

Even a pure, healthful spirit might have felt a nameless sadness, the subtle depressing influence of the scene and hour; but upon this guilty, remorseful, self-debased one it pressed with a sickening chill and gloom that he dared not try to analyze, and could not shake off. He drew his hat low over his eyes and pressed on in the vain effort to escape from himself.

Some one came down the road toward him—a strong, erect, manly figure with a quick, firm step. David Sheldon recognized it—Mr. Barclay, the superintendent of the mines. He would gladly have avoided meeting him, but it was too late for that, and he shuffled

uneasily to one side of the road and walked slowly on with downcast eyes. Even then he saw with furtive, sidelong glance the half-pitying, half-contemptuous look the superintendent bestowed upon him as he hastened by. When he had fairly passed David Sheldon paused almost involuntarily, and looked after him with a strange blending of anger, admiration and self-abasement.

What power and vigorous manhood that lithe, active form revealed! What a free, sure, decided step it was that carried him so rapidly down the mountain-road! Ay, he was a man clear-eyed, cool-headed, sound of heart and brain, doing a man's work in the world—useful, honest work—and going back at night to a home that his presence gladdened; while for himself—David Sheldon clenched his hands and ground his teeth as the sharp contrast pierced him. He was not many years older, his constitution had been as good, his frame as strong, as this man's; he had a right to all that strength and vitality, and yet he looked down upon his unsteady feet and trembling hands, and even while he hated Cade Barclay for the

compassion and contempt of his glance, he duplicated it in the one he bestowed upon himself. He dropped down upon a jutting rock by the lonely roadside and covered his face with his nerveless, quivering hands, while a surge of anguish swept over his soul—an unutterable torture that only those who have felt it can understand.

Such brooding could not long be borne. Even the rough, boisterous, hectoring crowd at the Mountaineers' Rest seemed less intolerable company. Rising, he turned to retrace his steps. A bend in the road showed, down the hillside on a lower level, the great coke-ovens. From the open mouths of some rolled up volumes of flame and smoke, while through others the eye looked down into great reservoirs of fire—the white glow of intense heat, while all the sky and snow were lighted with a red glare. They suggested horrible fancies to the drunkard's disordered vision.

“As if the infernal regions were expecting company and had thrown open every door to receive them,” he said.

In the cabin the number of occupants had increased during his absence. Many of the

miners had come in, and the times, the work and the prices paid were being angrily or gloomily discussed. The tones and dialect of different nationalities mingled. Some who had been there before noticed Sheldon's return, however, and one called out,

"Dad, be ye low-spereted yet? Come, take a drink?"

He accepted the invitation eagerly—anything to drown his wretchedness and hush the torturing thoughts that had awakened within him.

Suddenly a shrill, childish voice broke in among the babel of utterances:

"Spend your money for whisky and rum,  
And let your children go hungry at home.  
The whisky-seller takes all the gold,  
And the folks at your house are ragged and cold."

Tony, tempted by the bright sunshine of the early afternoon, had wandered up the mountain and lingered here and there about the cabins, talking with some of the children and finding great attraction for her curiosity-loving nature at the mine. Returning, late though it had grown, she could not resist the impulse to pause when she came suddenly

upon the Mountaineers' Rest, and recognized in it one of her enemies. Her clear, strong young voice penetrated to the farthest corner of the cabin:

"He don't care if they've nothing to wear!  
The rumseller wants it all for his share."

"What's that?" said the bartender, starting up angrily.

"That young one of mine," exclaimed a low-browed, swarthy-skinned man, a French Canadian by birth, a wanderer everywhere, who seemed to have gained the vices of all nations and the virtues of none. "I'll—" The threats and invectives sank, fortunately, to indistinguishable mutterings as he rushed to the door.

Tony was gone, however. Her quick eyes had discovered her father, and, daring as she was where strangers were concerned, she did not want to meet him.

"Let her alone, Pierre. She was telling nothing but the truth," David Sheldon said in bitterness.

"Truth? Look here, Dad Sheldon, don't get personal. I'm no robber of anybody's

folks," said the man at the bar with a half laugh, yet evidently not well pleased. "‘Never speak ill of the bridge that carries you over,’ mind."

"Carries us over to ruin," muttered Sheldon, but, not daring to offend, he only muttered the words and said nothing more.

Presently lamps were lighted in the room. Some of the men who had been loitering about the stove went away, but their places were filled by others who had been up to their cabin homes for supper. A table was drawn out in one corner of the room, and Pierre and a few others gathered around it with hands full of greasy cards. There was no back room into which they could withdraw for the playing, but that mattered little in this mountain-den, which, as the proprietor felicitated himself, was outside the city, and so far up the rugged road as to be seldom troubled by the inspection of police or other inconvenient visitors.

The air grew thick with tobacco-smoke and heavy with liquor-laden breath as the evening wore on. It would have been intolerable, even to lungs accustomed to a poi-

soned atmosphere, but that each newcomer, in Western fashion, flung the door wide open and left it so until some other, shivering from the draught, closed it again.

David Sheldon brought coal and water for the establishment, called for something to drink again, and was not refused. His wretchedness and feeling of degradation wore away. He watched the game of cards with interest, and made what appeared to himself to be profound observations. He began to discover great wit in the commonplace remarks of others, and to express his appreciation accordingly. His brain was exhilarated, his tongue loosened. Joining a group who were moodily discussing the reductions, abuses and prospects at the mines, he caught the spirit of the party, and, waxing indignant at once, declared his opinion in fiery words that met only too full approval from his hearers.

“That’s the talk, dad! A speech! give us a speech!” cried one or two of the men who were occupied during the day at the coal-track and lading-wharf. They were Americans—or so far Americanized as to

possess the national taste for speech-making—and the cry once started, even the foreign miners echoed it.

The speaker was not reluctant, and his audience prefaced his remarks with another glass of liquor, which, as its fumes mounted to his brain, increased his impression of his own importance and the value of his opinions, and at the same time his sympathy with these men who so appreciated his genius. Noble souls they were, ground down by cruel oppression and tyranny, he said in his opening sentence from his rostrum, one of the benches vacated for his accommodation.

Not yet sufficiently intoxicated to be incoherent, he was roused to a sudden wild interest in this subject, for which he had cared nothing an hour before. Much of his old gift of ready speech still lingered, and, moved by his own eloquence and the applause of his hearers, he poured forth a torrent of burning words, contrasting the palace-like homes of the owners of the mines with the poor little cabins on the mountain; the splendid entertainments

where money flowed like water with the shivering, hungry children asking vainly for clothing and food. He sneeringly demanded where retrenchment began when dull times came. Not by sacrificing a single pearl from the lady's necklacé or a horse from the gentleman's stable, but by grinding down the laborer's low wages a few cents lower still, making the loaf only a half one.

Then he mockingly recommended patience, reminding them that supply and demand governed all these things—not, however, the supply of money in the capitalist's coffers or the demand of the laborer's starving family for food. The dim remembrance of Cade Barclay's look lingered with him, and, awakening only hatred now, added to the bitterness of his denunciations. His vehement speech suited the mood of many of his listeners, while it excited some almost to desperation with its pictures of wrong and injustice. For, exaggerated as many of his statements were, unsound and partial the arguments mingling with his rhodomontade, there was underlying them

the half truth that made them effective. Grasping greed and selfishness had been too apparent for denial, and the privation in many of the cabins was a bitter fact.

An effort to forget their enforced idleness, discouragement and gloom, or to talk it over with comrades, had drawn some of those men to that room that night. A weak and shameful remedy they had sought, it is true, but that did not lessen their bitterness. Roused to fresh indignation by their orator, they gathered in groups when he ceased to drink yet more deeply and talk yet more wildly.

Tony, going home that night, concluded that if her father's anger had been so aroused as to induce him to come in pursuit of her, it would be safer to allow him to find himself alone and have opportunity to drink himself into stupor before she met him; so she paused only long enough to devour the bread and cold potato she dignified by the name of supper, and then sought the street again. She wandered down to the little house where Billy lived, attracted by her fancy for him, but scarcely with any hope

of meeting him at that hour, when the street-lamps were already lighted. She espied him, however, entering the store opposite, and followed him without hesitation.

Miss Hannah looked her astonishment at such temerity:

“Ain’t you the girl that took an orange from here a while ago?”

Tony nodded.

“Well, if I should have you arrested for it, what would you say then?” demanded Miss Hannah severely.

“Say I borrowed it and sent it back,” said Tony coolly.

“Did I ever!” ejaculated Miss Hannah in amazement. “See here, child: don’t you know it’s wicked to steal?”

“No,” answered Tony.

“Don’t? You little heathen! Why—” Miss Hannah paused in bewilderment, and spoke out her only thought when she said, “What can a body do with you?”

Tony considered it a *bona-fide* question, and answered promptly with the desire of her heart:

“Make me a dress or something, so’s I

can go to that Sunday-school 'long of him," pointing to Billy.

"Well!" Miss Hannah lost her breath at this last piece of audacity, and rolled up Billy's parcel in utter silence. Tony watched her for a minute with her bright black eyes, and then gave up her flitting hope, as she was used to giving up things, without a word or sign.

The two children went out together, but when they had reached the sidewalk Miss Hannah marched suddenly to the door and opened it:

"Child—you girl!" as both turned, "you may come here to-morrow and let me take your measure. I don't know as there'll be any harm in that."

"Yes'm," answered Tony, and that "'m" was an unusual effort and meant a great deal, if Miss Hannah had only known it.

Billy could not stop to talk, and Tony wandered on alone, coming back at last to Mrs. Flaherty's tenement, and discovering with satisfaction that her room had no light.

"Maybe it's *His* thinking for me that did it," she mused, pondering her evening's suc-

cess. "'Cause I didn't s'pose that store-woman would do it so easy."

Meanwhile, the "store-woman," moved by a Hand unseen, was even then reviewing her wardrobe with a view to finding something that might be spared to "cut over." How strangely much of the world's work is done! Billy's childish indignation had made Tony a persevering temperance lecturer, and Tony's ignorant request had transformed Miss Hannah into a home missionary.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *LIGHT SHINING IN DARKNESS.*

LOUISE had found a new employment. Miss Hannah suggested it one day when, on bringing in a modest supply of articles which she had been purchasing for her store, her eye rested upon the neat little boxes in which some of them were enclosed.

“See here,” she said to Louise, who was selecting a skein of silk, “why can’t you make these?”

“Toilet soap? needles?” questioned Louise in bewilderment.

“No—these boxes, all covered with fancy paper and pictures on top. Somebody has to make them.”

“If I could do it!” said Louise, interested at once. “If I could get it to do! But then I suppose there are only too many

working at it already." She concluded her sentence despondently.

"Maybe, and maybe not," responded Miss Hannah. She was not one to give up any idea of hers without a struggle. "I know a place where they make such things, or rather I know a woman that's been working there for years, and it's likely she could tell something about it—whether there'd be any chance of their giving out more work. There won't be any harm in asking, and I mean to do it."

She kept her word, and in a few days reported that her acquaintance had inquired at the factory and thought some work might be obtained. They had only a small amount to give out then—of the more common boxes, with which alone a novice would be trusted. It would furnish employment for the present, and permanent occupation at any time would depend upon the skill and taste evinced in the work.

Small as the beginning was, Louise accepted it gladly. It was better than the sewing, at least for her, since she soon acquired greater skill in it and could do it

more rapidly. The work suited her neat, deft fingers, and she speedily learned both daintiness and despatch in its accomplishment. She gave to it at first only spare hours, as she had been told there was no necessity for the immediate return of the boxes; and when at last they were completed and delivered she was agreeably surprised at receiving at once a fresh order and larger quantity of material. Still, she did not venture to bestow all her time upon it, so slender had been the hope held out to her of regular employment, but interspersed meantime what sewing she could do, until, returning her boxes time after time, she found that more were given her—more difficult and delicate work too—without any intimation of failure in the supply.

It brought but small compensation, but it was work that she could do at home, that received prompt payment, and it was no trifling item in their slender income. So she grew more restful and content as she found herself working steadily with the one purpose, though its fulfillment looked far off now—Susie's journey to New York.

By her sister's work-table Susie often lingered wistfully, passing her fingers slowly over the smooth papers and the glossy pictures.

"If I could see only a little—just enough to help!" she said sometimes—not often, however; she was learning to repress the utterance of the wish that could not be gratified—that only awakened afresh the pain of those around her. "I wonder," she questioned one day, "if I couldn't learn to fold the papers? It seems as if I might, with the paste-board for a guide."

She secured a sheet of waste paper and began experimenting with it, trying again and again for hours, failing often, but at last succeeding in the simple task that sight would have rendered so easy.

"I can do it!" she cried, a glow of pleasure flushing her pale cheeks.

After that she sat often by Louise's table, folding the papers with slow-moving, careful fingers, pathetic in their very patience. Those weeks of darkness had been strange weeks to Susie—so long already it seemed to her that she had been shut out from light and all the

world, and shut in to herself. The loneliness of her sorrow oppressed her. Others loved her, were near her, but they could neither lighten nor enter into the gloom that enshrouded her. She felt separated from them, isolated. There were times when all human voices sounded afar off—when the long black future looked unendurable, and she could find no words for the chill, awful dread that weighed upon her spirit.

Many times, in the hours when she sat quietly with drooping lids, and they could not tell whether she were thinking or sleeping, she recalled those last words her failing eyes had ever read—the story of the blind restored. It was out of terrible darkness like this that the wonderful voice had summoned them into light. How long they had waited, perhaps, for His coming—listening, as she was listening now, to all the coming and going steps in the street, but hoping, as she could not, to catch the sound of his feet!

How they must have loved him afterward! Were not they faithful, she wondered, in the time of desertion, suffering and cruel

death that came to him? She wished she had read more of these things when she could have done it so easily—that they were familiar to her now. There was so much she wanted to know about that marvelous Life that had grown to have such a new interest to her.

“I suppose it’s because I can’t see, and I think so much, that makes it seem sometimes so real to me—almost like something that might be now, instead of only what happened so long ago,” she said to Miss Ruey.

“‘But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is He;  
And faith hath still its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.  
The healing of his seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain;  
We touch him in life’s throng and press,  
And we are whole again,’”

Miss Ruey replied in one of the fragments of verse stowed away in her memory, and which she loved to repeat. But she did not explain. It seldom occurred to her that the truths she knew so well and held so precious, and the promises on which she rested, were

any less familiar to those around her than to herself.

Susie but dimly understood. Many times afterward she repeated to herself, as nearly as she could remember them, the words whose sweetness she felt without being able wholly to comprehend. Did Miss Ruey mean that he was really the same as then? No, that could not be. He was in heaven now, high and lifted up, to be worshiped in prayer and praise, all-seeing and all-powerful indeed, but it was all so different from the time when in human form he walked among men—when they could press to his very feet with their petitions, hear his voice and feel his touch. There were many blind ones in the world now, but none of them ever raised the joyful cry, “Jesus the Lord hath given me sight!” Susie whispered mournfully to herself.

So her thoughts went back again and again to that olden time in which it seemed to her it would have been so blessed to live, since no boon would have been impossible with the Christ within reach. Did any ever watch in vain along roads where he never

passed? And out of her pondering and questioning, the longing to know more of the story which so haunted her, grew at last the courage to ask for it when Louise one day offered to read to her.

“Will you read the Bible, Louise? I’d rather have that than anything else, if you don’t mind,” she said timidly, but very earnestly.

Louise looked at her wonderingly. The Bible! That was for churches and sick people. But then this was pretty nearly the same thing—poor blind Susie! The request touched her afresh with a sense of her sister’s affliction, and she did not speak the surprise she looked, but after a moment’s hesitation answered only with an assenting monosyllable:

“Well!”

She might have opened at any of the kingly chronicles or genealogies, for aught she knew of seeking any special portion as appropriate or comforting; but Susie directed her:

“Some of those places where it tells of Jesus healing the blind, Louise. There’s a

chapter in St. John, if you don't know about any others. Find that, please, and then read on from there. I want to know what came afterward."

A slow turning of the leaves, and at last the unskilled seeker found the place and began to read, while Susie listened with the eager intentness of one who must hear the words once for all and remember, since she could not read them again. Her earnest interest surprised Louise, and when she had read through several chapters and closed the book, she said,

"Why, Sue, you have heard all that before!"

"Yes—I don't know; it hardly seems as if I ever had," answered Sue uncertainly. Of one thing she was sure: it had never been the same to her before, never held for her as much meaning, confused and dim though that meaning was to her now. She thought of the words and studied them in the lonely darkness that shut her in—of those strange sweet sentences, "I am the door of the sheep;" "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in

and out and find pasture." They had a sound of rest and refuge and home. Then those other words, more wonderful still, spoken to the mourning sisters: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." She pictured that scene vividly, as it might seem if Nat were dead and she and Louise had sent that message.

Other readings followed that first one, but they were infrequent and irregular in those busy, hurried days, in which Susie found only rare half hours when any one was sufficiently at leisure for her to prefer her request. All the more perhaps because of that she prized the chapters when they came, and treasured and pondered them. Slowly her knowledge of the word grew, her familiarity with that Life in which all our lives are hidden, and she began to understand why it might be more to Miss Ruey than merely an olden story.

So, while she was searching in the long-ago and in far-away Judea for Him, the

hand pierced for her sake was knocking at the door of her heart, that the Lord might enter and abide; a tender voice was saying, "The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber?"

"I used to wish," she said to Miss Ruey one day when the longing and hungry questioning found its way at last into words, "that I could go to the Lord, as they used to do, to ask for my sight; but now it seems as if I could not be quite satisfied with only that or any gift—as if I wanted himself."

"True, dear; nothing else does satisfy any of us," Miss Ruey answered with her quiet smile.

"If I only could! if I knew what to do!" said Susie wistfully in unfinished sentences.

Her look and tone, more than her words, awakened Miss Ruey to a partial understanding of Susie's ignorance and bewilderment.

"Why, child, it isn't like that," she said. "You never wanted him till he wanted you, and found you too. It isn't as if you must go searching for him with something that you can do, but that he has come to you, of-

fering what he has done. You have only to accept. 'Tisn't that you must go out somewhere and buy; it's just opening to One who stands at your door with a gift: 'Behold I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' That's the way it is; don't you see?"

"But I've been so selfish and wrong about a good many things! I didn't use to think so, but I know it now; and I never tried to learn about any of these things when I could see," began Susie doubtfully, after a moment's silent thought.

"'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,'" interposed Miss Ruey.

"And I'm afraid—I'm sure—I can't be real good even now," Susie added.

"Child, it isn't our righteousness that is anything, or even can be; it's his that avails for us. That's counted as if it were ours," explained Miss Ruey earnestly. "Jesus takes our sins and gives us his merit. Trust all that to him; you've nothing else to do."

A light was breaking slowly over Susie's face.

"If I only knew, and could be just sure that all those promises meant me!" she said.

"'Whosoever'—doesn't that mean you? 'Whosoever will'—that's what the Lord himself has said. Can't you believe his own words?"

"Oh, I am so glad!" the girl answered simply, but the look that swept over the pale face emphasized the words.

Into that kingdom that "cometh not with observation" another soul had entered as a willing and loyal subject. Susie groped her slow way across the street that evening, with eyes darkened to all the outer world still, but beholding "the King in his beauty." She turned an unseeing glance to the sunset sky, but whispered softly the words Miss Ruey had once repeated with faint hope of their comforting: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

Susie did not know where the words belonged—only somewhere in the Bible—and she wondered even while she uttered them if she should ever come to them in the irregular readings that only could be hers—wondered with the old longing to “know what came afterward.” When they found she cared so much for the one book, they offered to read to her from it sometimes—Louise, the mother in her rare moments of leisure, and even little Billy now and then. But at last the service came oftenest from one whom she had not thought of asking—Nat, tired from his day’s work at the mill, but with no special occupation for his evenings.

“I’ll read to you a while if you like, Susie,” he said one evening, noticing the momentary disappointment in her face when Billy summarily closed the volume he had but just opened, and ran away on some forgotten errand suddenly recalled.

“If you were not so tired at night—” she answered hesitatingly.

“Oh, that’s all the more reason,” he said cheerily. “You see, I get sleepy in a little

while reading to myself, because I'm so busy all day. I suppose that sitting still makes me drowsy; and maybe I'll keep awake if I read aloud. What book did Billy have?" taking it up as he spoke. "Oh! this?"

There was a curious falling inflection in the utterance of the last words, but he covered it in a moment: "Well, we'll read this, if you like."

It was only because she liked. He confided to Louise that it "seemed queer and solemn, sort of like a church, to be just reading that. But then if she fancied it, poor Sue! Anything to give her pleasure."

Her face with its earnestness, the new look of restfulness that came to it as she listened, was a sufficient reward to him, and he repeated his offer until, almost unconsciously, he found himself growing interested.

"See here," he said, stopping short one day, "I've heard of all these things before in a kind of here-and-there, now-and-then way, like taking bits of a picture at random, upside down or anyhow, without even having them fitted together. One never

gets much idea of what the whole is like in that way. This seems different when you take it along so, chapter after chapter as they belong; it's more like a real history or story to get interested in, and not just a lot of texts: that's mostly what the Bible has always seemed to me. Suppose we begin at the beginning of this," laying his hand on the New Testament, "and read it regularly through? I don't believe I know much about it, after all."

"Oh, I'd like it so much!" she said eagerly, surprised and gladdened by the unexpected proposition. "I've so often wished I had done it when I could see, and now—"

That unfinished sentence would have decided the unselfish, warm-hearted Nat if he had spoken only for her sake; and he turned at once to the first chapter and began, reading somewhat stumblingly through the list of names of whose owners he knew nothing, until he reached what he deemed the real history of "him who was born King of the Jews."

Afterward, evening after evening, the



Nat reads to his blind sister.



brother and sister sat together by the old table in the little kitchen—Susie with bent head, the hands, grown white and slender with their enforced idleness, clasped in her lap, her eyes that could not see the form beside her beholding far-away Judea; while Nat, his rugged face bent over the book, his toil-hardened fingers turning slowly the leaves, read the strange history, pausing occasionally for question or comment.

Nat was inclined to make thorough work of the reading when he began to feel interested in it; he wanted to turn backward and forward for information, and to search out in an old commentary some account of the kings and rulers mentioned. He found the evenings growing pleasant to him.

“When a fellow hasn’t studied anything for so long, there’s a sort of enjoyment in beginning again. I believe I always did like history—what little I got of it when I was at school,” he said.

It might have been only the history that had any attraction for him now, yet there were sentences sometimes that lingered with him through the long days at the mill—

words that haunted him with their beauty, their mystery or their deep meaning. There was time for thinking in those dreary winter days when the sun shone but faintly through the rows of soiled and dusty windows and lay in dim patches on the worn and blackened floor, while the machinery reached out and drew back its long iron arms unceasingly and the steady looms wove the many threads into one. The regular, monotonous rattle and roar shut out human voices and left others to whisper at will.

Gloomy, foreboding voices those others had often been to Nat, reminding him of his father's wretched life, of the poverty, care and suffering at home, and of his own cramped and darkened boyhood; questioning, torturingly, whether it must go on so always; how he could ever hope to reach anything higher or better while dire necessity bound him to this toilsome round; and what was to become of them all in the years that were coming. Mechanically attending to his work, he had thought and planned through many a day, almost despairingly, but now, sometimes, there mingled among

these doubts and fears strange, new utterances, as if a pitying, reassuring voice had spoken: "Are ye not of more value than many sparrows?" "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Outwardly, the home-life went on with but little change, except that Nat could not obtain as much extra work as he had done earlier in the season. Each month they looked forward, wondering how they should meet the next; how obtain what must be had; how do without what could not be procured. The hope of medical treatment for Susie, though they worked toward it still, seemed postponed indefinitely. After the night when the money was stolen they neither saw nor heard anything of the miserable father for several days, and when at last he returned, silent and sullen, no one questioned him concerning the loss or upbraided him with it—not so much from any motives of pity or pardon, as because it would have been useless or worse.

But Susie had come to that "whatsoever ye ask in my name," and it was then that

she first began to pray for her father. If that marked any epoch in the family history, they did not know it then, so quietly was that word making its entrance which like a leaven should yet permeate all their lives.

To Miss Ruey, as it was natural that she should, Susie carried many of her questions and perplexities, doubts and troubles, that those nearest to her could not understand.

"Some days I feel so sure, so content!" she said. "And then at other times I don't know—I don't feel as I ought."

"Well," answered Miss Ruey reassuringly, "it's a blessed thing that it isn't our feelings that saves us; it's the Lord. We haven't got to be satisfied with them, but with him."

"But sometimes I think maybe I am not his at all," confessed Susie mournfully.

"It doesn't so much matter what you think about that, child, as what he thinks. It's his word that settles it: 'Whosoever believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life.' If you believe, you have the life, however your feelings are. I suppose," continued Miss Ruey thoughtfully, "that dreadful night in Egypt, when the destroying angel went

through the land, all the Israelites sitting in their houses didn't feel alike. Most likely some of them felt trusting and not a bit afraid, while others shivered and trembled, and didn't know whether they'd live or die. But they were all alike safe if the blood-mark was over the door; that made the safety, though of course the believing, trusting ones felt a great deal the happiest. You see 't isn't our feelings, Susie; they go up and down, here and there, but the Lord is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

Miss Hannah's entrance ended the conversation. Susie never felt like talking before her as she loved to do with Miss Ruey alone, but she was ready now to turn with lightened heart to a consideration of the work Miss Hannah brought in—a dress for poor vagabond little Tony. The child had come, according to direction, to be measured for the garment, and had been carefully watched by Miss Hannah's sharp eyes while she remained—a fact Tony had not been slow to discover or hesitated to comment upon:

"You needn't be afraid; I won't touch no more of your oranges."

"I don't know about that," said Miss Hannah, by way of impressing her with the evil results of dishonesty. "When folks steal once, nobody knows when to trust them afterward."

"Nobody won't trust me anyhow, nor father either, 'cause he's tried to get bread and meat from the store often, and the man won't let him have it unless he pays," answered Tony composedly. "Going to make my dress out of that?"

Miss Hannah groaned inwardly, nevertheless she persevered in her work. It was not very speedily accomplished, for she was not an expert dressmaker, and Tony was required to appear several times to have it tried and fitted—a part of the programme that suited the child well. She had plenty of time, and few places except the street in which to spend it; and she liked passing through the shop into the neat little sitting-room, where the rag carpet and bright stove, the box of flowers in the window and the old-fashioned clock in the corner, were all curiosities to her. She was well content to linger and look about her while Miss Hannah ripped

and basted, pinned and unpinned. She liked too to watch Miss Ruey—"That white, still little woman, that looks so kind of clean and like sunshine," she said to Billy, trying to describe what had impressed her in the gentle peaceful face that smiled so kindly upon her.

At last the dress was finished, and Tony surveyed herself in it with great satisfaction. Miss Hannah thought there ought to be some other feeling also, and made an effort to call it forth:

"Now, Tony—if that's your name, though I do say it don't sound fit for a girl—I've taken a good deal of trouble with that."

"Yes'm," said Tony, examining the sleeve and patting approvingly the strip of bright braid with which it was finished.

"Well, you ought to feel very grateful."

"Yes'm, I do," said Tony coolly.

"I hope so, I'm sure," answered Miss Hannah doubtfully. "But saying so don't amount to much; how'll you try to show it?"

"P'rade up and down 'fore Peg Flaherty's windows and make her mad as two

hoses," declared Tony promptly. "Show it? Guess I will! She hasn't got a rag that begins to be as good as this;" and she tossed her head and minced across the room in imitation of the promenade with which she intended to favor Mrs. Flaherty.

Miss Hannah despairingly allowed her to depart.

"The little heathen! I do say it's time she had a dress decent enough to let her into Sunday-school or some place where she can learn—if anybody can teach her anything. Well, I've done my duty."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN WHISKY ROW.

“**T**HE butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker,’ and all of them *not* ‘gone to the fair,’ but out on the street, I think, and taking the opportunity to ring our door-bells, one at a time,” soliloquized Jessie Barclay, half laughing, half vexed, as she carefully deposited sleeping Blossom in the cradle and prepared to answer the bell for the fourth or fifth time that morning. “Who next, I wonder? I’ve already declined a superior article of soap and a lotion to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to, besides refusing to supply myself with a new-fashioned stew-pan and a history of the war. Queer that everybody must seize upon this day to call, when Ann is away and Bridget sick with one of her headaches!”

A second and more vigorous peal sound-

ing through the hall quickened her movements, and carefully closing the door, that Blossom might not be disturbed, she ran down stairs. This time it was no vender of goods, but a little boy who occupied the steps.

"Mother said fur me to tell ye she'd like fur ye to come 'round, 'cause Jakey hain't no better," he observed, with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the doorstone.

"'Jakey'?" Jessie repeated, trying to identify her visitor. "Do you live on the mountain?"

"No'm—down in the Row."

"I don't remember," said Jessie slowly, groping among her various experiences. "Is Jakey a baby? Was he sick when I called at your house one day?" she questioned.

"Yes'm," answered the boy in the same expressionless tone, his hands in his pockets, his eyes still downcast.

"I know the place, then, I think. Yes, I will come. Tell your mother I will come to-day."

"She'll be 'bliged, 'cause she says there hain't nothin' to make the chicken-broth

out'n," the boy remarked — "nothin' but the bones what's been cooked twice; an' she says there hain't no more good in 'em than chips."

A faint smile crossed Jessie's lips at the opinion so solemnly expressed, yet the want at which it hinted might be pitiful enough. She repeated her promise:

"I will come. Tell your mother I will see what can be done."

The boy drew a long, audible breath, as if relieved that his errand was discharged, and, making his way decorously to the gate, started from that point at full speed.

Jessie knew less of the people in the "Row" and its neighborhood than of those up on the mountain. The cabins had attracted her first by their picturesque surroundings and their nearness to the mines. She had noticed them often in her rambles before she knew much of their inmates, and had grown acquainted with them and their wants gradually. Yet many of the miners and the larger number of men employed about the two shafts lived at the foot of the mountain. It was not a pleasant neighbor-

hood in any respect. The dingy houses were wondrously alike in their cheerlessness. Occasionally a clean yard or neatly-curtained window broke the monotony, but they were too few to redeem the generally forlorn aspect of the place; and the weather-beaten, unpainted buildings, the dirty children playing about the doors and in the street, the road cut into deep ruts by heavy wagons and black with coal-dust and the smoke that from furnaces and chimneys overhung it all like a thick dark cloud, made a dreary and uninviting picture.

The locality had gained an unenviable reputation too for affrays, drunkenness and general lawlessness—a notoriety which had rapidly increased during the last year, until the mere fact of living on “Coal Ridge” or in the vicinity of “Whisky Row,” as the newspapers had dubbed the settlement below, was in itself, if not a positive stigma, at least a cause for suspicion. Nevertheless, the women-faces that looked out from the doors and windows were very human, and, passing there so often, Mrs. Barclay had occasionally stopped to speak with them—

to seek some direction at first or to beg a glass of water for Robbie, who sometimes accompanied her, and who, childlike, grew thirsty at the most inconvenient places. Afterward, when she recognized them at the gate or doorway, she had paused now and then to talk a few minutes. In this way she had made the acquaintance of "Jakey"—she remembered now that small wailing bundle wrapped in a shawl—and the mother who had invited her in to look at the sick child.

She found the place readily, and the woman opening the door led the way with scarcely a word to the bed where the little one lay, wasted to a mere skeleton now, its fretting changed to a feeble moan.

"I don't know what ails him, or if anybody can do any good. I've done all I know," said the mother, looking at him with dull eyes. "I thought I'd send—you said to, if you could be any help—but I don't know if it's any use."

"Have you had any one to see him—a doctor?" asked Jessie.

"Yes. One of the men up on the hill

got his foot mashed, and they sent for a doctor for him. I watched till he came back, and called him in to Jakey ; but he didn't say much, only left a bit of a powder for him, and said, 'Give him a little broth now and then.' I don't know if that's any good, but I've done it—some. I've done all I know," she repeated. Then, as her visitor raised one of the tiny wasted hands, she added, "More'n a year and a half old, but he don't look like it. Won't never be much older, 'tain't likely."

Mrs. Barclay looked wonderingly at the heavy eyes that did not droop or moisten. She did not think it probable the child would live, but she held out the possibility of it to this mother as she would have clung to it herself.

"You must not give up all hope yet," she said ; "he may live."

"If he don't he'll miss a deal of trouble," said another woman, a neighbor, coming forward from the corner where she had been sitting.—"'Tain't for you to be frettin,' Marget, like folks where there's less mouths an' more to fill 'em."

It was coarse consolation, but the mother seemed to appreciate its force.

"True enough," she said. "Not that I grudge what I'd give him or do for him—the child!—but he'll be better off away; so would the rest the same."

"No, no, do not think that, do not say it!" exclaimed Jessie, shuddering at the matter-of-course way in which the last words were spoken. "How could you live without your children, hard as it is to provide for them?—and I know in these times it is hard, very hard, for many of the poor people here."

"It's all of us I meant, not them. And it's not saying that I don't love mine as ladies love theirs," she flashed out suddenly at the look on Mrs. Barclay's face. "But you don't know the hardness. 'Twould be different if you'd see things get worse and worse, blacker and blacker, all the time 'round your own, and no signs of anything better—everything going and nothing coming. My John ain't like some," she added with a sidelong glance at her neighbor. "He worked as long as he could get it, and

brought home the money too, and now, after all, it's like this."

"What wonder if more of 'em do drink to forget all their troubles?" interrupted the other woman sullenly. "'Tain't me that would blame 'em; they must do something. Rich folks can't tell."

"They've said the upper shaft would open soon—to wait quiet and the work would be plenty soon; and it's spring now, and no moves to it yet," continued the mother of the child, unheeding the other's remark. "Some says, 'Go away.' And how can a man go with times dull everywhere, and nowhere to go to, and no money to take him, and nothing to leave to keep his children? So he stays and does what bits of work he can, thrown out more'n half the time, and waits. And John says 'tain't the rich men that owns it all that's getting poorer: the loss is all to us folks, and there's no right to it—and I don't know," she concluded, with the look of one wronged and defrauded, though unable to tell how or by whom. She could not unravel the tangle.

Jessie said nothing of supply and demand,

of capital and labor, and the rights and duties of each. She did not attempt to explain the subject; the problem was far too deep for her solving, and to their question of what they were to do if there was not work soon she could only answer sadly,

"I do not know, except to wait and to bear as trustingly as you can. God does care."

"And it's easy for you, who have full and plenty, to say so," commented the neighbor in her hard voice.

It was true. Jessie felt it, glancing at her soft, warm dress, thinking of her sheltered home.

"Yes, I know; it must seem so to you," she answered with dimmed eyes.

Her honest tears brought her nearer to them than any words could have done.

"'Twas kind of you to come to Jakey; I'm not forgettin' that," the mother said in a softer tone, lifting the little basket Mrs. Barclay had brought, and beginning to remove the delicacies it contained.

A slight convulsive movement drew Jessie's attention again to the child, and her

summons recalled the mother. A change had passed over the little face; the breath came shorter and fainter, ceased for a moment, came again in a feeble, fluttering gasp, then was gone, and the little sufferer was at rest. Jessie tenderly closed the eyes that had looked so little way into our human life, bathed the tiny form and straightened the baby limbs, robbed of all their roundness. Then she went away, promising to return in the morning.

Outside, the south wind blew softly and whispered of the presence of spring. A faint sweetness was in the air, as if it had gathered already the breath of far-away violets. Gleams of bright blue smiled down through rifts in the clouded sky, and on sunny southern slopes patches of pale green verdure were beginning to show. All Nature was telling a story of fresh life and hope that those darkened homes did not know. The contrast pressed heavily on Jessie's heart as she walked slowly homeward.

"It is hard," her husband answered when she told him at night of her visit and of what the women had said. "It is all tan-

gled and wrong to them—only the pain and privation are clear and distinct enough—and we can scarcely wonder if, reasoning about it in blind and desperate fashion, they do sometimes feel almost ready to believe the world in league against them, and every one better off than themselves an oppressor. I hear a great deal of fierce, unreasonable talk that I should scarcely endure with any patience if I did not now and then imagine myself in their place. I tell you, Jessie, I can understand how a man, sitting day after day in his comfortless home and seeing his wife and little ones suffer, may look down on his strong hands—so able and willing to work, and yet denied the chance—and grow maddened and desperate. Only a strong faith that the Lord's 'kingdom ruleth over all,' and that he is our Father tender and pitiful, could save from it; and the most of these people are ignorant in all such knowledge."

"And they will not listen to it now," Jessie said, "though so many of them are making matters worse, and growing worse themselves, by the course they are taking—squandering what little they have in drunk-

eness. Cade"—wistfully, questioningly—"you do not know at all when that upper shaft will be open again? If you could give me any definite word for them, any prospect—"

"I cannot, Jessie; I do not know. I have used what influence I have, urged the matter even more than I felt my position warranted for their sakes, and because I really believe it would be no loss to the company. But it is postponed from one time to another. They do not view it as I do. They see no positive profit in beginning now, and as for keeping the men, they are quite willing that they should scatter; more can easily be found when the work is ready for them."

"Oh, Cade, it is all so hard and so hopeless!" Jessie sighed.

He answered with his grave smile, as he had often answered before:

"Little woman, do not try to take the whole world on your shoulders. We can only do our best, however little that may be; but beyond that is His strength who can do all, and who is far wiser and kinder than we."

“Yes.” Jessie’s heart settled back upon that remembrance with a long, restful breath. “It is such a comfort to drop all the tangles into his hands!” she said.

It was what she was wont to do with them always—the troubling, perplexing things that she could not straighten or bring into order; the tangled, twisted threads where she could find neither beginning nor end, which yet made rough places, great or small, in her own life or the lives of others. She was learning to drop them all into his hands, sure of their tireless patience and infinite loving power.

“Cade,” she said thoughtfully later that evening, “what if we should give up the improvements we planned for the house and grounds this year, and do with as little as we can—we are comfortable as we are, almost wickedly comfortable, I feel sometimes—and so have the more left to give these people?”

“Not to *give* them. We can do better than that by using it in a way that will give employment to as many of them as possible. I can find a way, and I should be

very glad to do it if you are willing. It will be a positive relief to me, as well as to them," he answered with brightening face. "I have thought sometimes of proposing it, only that I knew you had planned so much."

"Oh, Cade," she interrupted suddenly, earnestly, "never grow selfish for my sake—never let me do it because of my ignorance of things that you know. 'Christ first' it must be with us always."

When she sought the house in the "Row" the next morning she carried with her some of the choicest blossoms from her plants and a pretty, simple white dress of her own baby's. The mother watched while she robed the tiny sleeper, and seemed to derive a strange comfort from the garment's dainty whiteness.

"So fine and clean and soft!" she said, passing her fingers over it with lingering touch. "It seems sort of resting to see him in it—like he was well cared for and didn't just belong here, with everything this way. I don't know—" She finished the sentence, or rather left it unfinished, in her common groping way. Then, as Jessie placed flowers on the pillow and in the little hand,

she looked up at her: "You're very kind. I hope 'twon't never come to you."

There seemed but scant thanks in the acknowledgment, but the merest humanity in the wish; but they meant more than that or the woman would not have spoken at all. Jessie tried to tell her something of the land to which her baby had gone, of the loving Lord who had called him thither; but she received little response, and could not tell whether her words awakened any interest, or whether they were simply endured for the sake of what she had done.

She had planned to go up on the mountain that morning, but had lingered longer in the house below than she had intended, and she had but just begun the ascent when she met a number of men with flushed, excited faces, talking angrily as they hurried down the road. They were too much engrossed with their subject to heed her, and she caught a word or two—only enough to assure her that there had been some fresh trouble or outbreak at the mines. She paused a moment, irresolute whether to proceed or return, and while she did so another

party appeared—policemen in charge of two or three men. Looking beyond them farther up the mountain, she discovered other groups still, and turning she slowly retraced her steps.

Mr. Barclay was late in returning that evening. The children were asleep and Jessie wandering anxiously from window to door, weaving her slight knowledge of the morning's trouble into a variety of miserable improbabilities, when he appeared. It had been a hard, wearing day, he said wearily. Some damage had been done to the tramway the night before—rails torn up and the track destroyed for some distance. What had been the motive for the deed it was impossible to say. It might have sprung from the general ill-feeling toward the mining company, or have resulted from one of the many quarrels between some of the miners and men who worked at the lading—a plan for revenge upon the latter by stopping their work and causing them loss. Liquor had been a prime mover in it evidently, for men not intoxicated would not have chosen so stupid a plot nor

have carried it out so bunglingly as to render the discovery of the perpetrators nearly certain.

The disturbance occasioned by the whole affair would have been comparatively trivial had it not been for the smothered bitterness and ill-feeling that were so prevalent—a smouldering fire always ready to burst into flame. As it was, some words spoken by Mr. Leavitt—who, unfortunately, paid a visit to the shaft early that morning—aroused vindictiveness and opposition at once.

“He is not slow to express his opinion at any time, and as he was particularly angry when he first discovered the mischief, he designated the doers of it by some adjectives not altogether undeserved perhaps,” said Mr. Barclay, smiling faintly at the remembrance, “but which had better not have been used there and by him, for he is not at all popular now. His fiery threat that the guilty ones should be prosecuted to the utmost extent of the law was answered with scowls and muttered remarks that even he could not fail to understand,

though he made a pretence of doing so. Still, there was no positive resistance when the criminals were finally tracked and arrested, nor even any actual collision between the men themselves, as I feared there might be; for they were divided, the lading-men angry at having their work interfered with. But they have been in a turbulent, excited state all day, seemingly just ready for an outbreak of some sort if only the slightest occasion offered.

“By way of mending matters and restoring good-nature, Mr. Leavitt tried something that he considered a stroke of policy, I presume. After the officers had made their arrests and were gone he turned to the sullen crowd near him with a congratulatory remark upon ‘our success,’ thanked them for their services in the matter, as if they had assisted to secure the culprits, and then flung some money among them—for a glass of beer to freshen them up for work again, he said. He rode away without stopping to mark the effect; and he would not have found it very gratifying if he had not. I heard one fellow remark sneeringly, ‘Ay, ay! fling away

in bribes what ye'd stint from us in honest wages!' Nevertheless, the money was snatched up in a hurry, and the Mountaineers' Rest will have an unusual flow of custom to-night and furnish something stronger than beer."

"Furnish material for any amount of fresh trouble to-morrow, I suppose?" said Jessie anxiously. "Oh, Cade! what does possess people to be so wickedly careless of the real good of others?"

"Only Cain's old question: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'"

## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE STING OF THE ADDER.*

IT was Monday, Miss Hannah's wash-day, and she was busy—in no steaming, soapy, dreary kitchen, but in the tidy back room, where she had thrown down a large square of oilcloth, arranged her tubs upon it, and could enjoy her work and Miss Ruey's society together; for Miss Hannah really did enjoy her washing, or prided herself upon it, which amounts to nearly the same thing. It was one of the fine arts to her, in which she would allow no inexperienced fingers to intermeddle.

The door leading to the store was open, that she might hear the slightest summons there and be ready at a moment's notice to doff her check apron, pull down her sleeves and attend upon a customer. The outer door was open also, that the soft spring air might

sweep in ; and so, with all things comfortably arranged, she could rub and discourse at will. Miss Hannah was unusually talkative on wash-days. Possibly, the tubs and pile of linen suggested dimly a speaker's stand, or more probably, having had all Sunday to think in, shut away from her accustomed active employment, she had collected various facts and opinions that needed to be brought out, brushed and put away, as she did her best clothes, before she was ready to settle down to the week's work.

Down the street that bright morning sauntered with slow and lagging step a forlorn figure—a man shabbily dressed, with an old slouched hat pulled low over his rough head, unshaven, heavy-eyed and seeming miserably out of harmony with the fresh, sweet spring-time. He was only walking aimlessly, neither noticing nor caring whither ; but when he reached the long step before Miss Hannah's door, its cleanliness and sunniness suggested a resting-place, and pausing he sat down there. He leaned back against the building, drew his hat still farther over his face to shield it alike

from the light and observation, and dropped into sleep or meditation, or a state halfway between the two.

Miss Hannah talked over the sermon she had heard the morning before, raising her voice the while to make it audible above the splashing and rubbing—told what parts of it she considered “good, sound doctrine, such as a body can hold onto,” and criticised other portions that to her “didn’t seem to have the real gospel sound.”

“For that’s what I judge by,” said Miss Hannah, snapping out a handkerchief vigorously. “I know real gospel when I hear it, if I don’t always get it straight into my actions; and I’m bound to say I do hear more than I manage to live, most of the time,” she confessed honestly.

Then she gave her opinion of choirs where “they sing all the words in I-talian or some other dead language,” and passed from that to an exposition of Scripture she had heard in the afternoon.

“And talking about meracles,” she branched off suddenly, “they say the age for them is past; but I do say for’t, it

looked 'most like one to me when I met that girl, Tony, dressed up decent and coming out from a Sunday-school like a civilized child. I didn't more'n half s'pose she'd go when I made the dress, or not go only once or twice, anyway; but she has, and she looked up at me smart as you please, with some tickets and papers in her hand."

"No telling how much good it'll do," said Miss Ruey, pleased and hopeful.

"And no telling how soon her drunken father'll get hold of that dress and sell it for whisky, so that she can't go any more," answered Miss Hannah, viewing the matter from an opposite point at once. "You can't tell any time what these drunken fathers won't do. Look at that one across the street!"

"Well, it must be a great trial—" began Miss Ruey, but Miss Hannah interrupted sharply:

"*Trial* ain't no name for it—don't begin to be. I've thought about it a good deal when I've seen him 'round, and I do b'lieve if there's one thing I never could get re-

signed to, 'twould be to a husband like that. I hain't never really tried," she remarked, stirring her suds meditatively—"don't know but I'd ought to, only it didn't seem likely to happen—but I tell you, Ruey, 'twould take more'n a wrastle to get resigned to that; 'twould be a reg'lar rough-and-tumble fight for't."

"Yes, it must be hard for them," began Miss Ruey again.

"Hard!" echoed Miss Hannah belligerently. "'Twas hard enough with that poor woman sewing night and day, and that boy in the factory all these years, when he ought to have been in school, and all of them pinched and scrimped every way to get along; but when it comes to that poor blind child—that her own father should steal the money they'd saved to have her eyes doctored—I say that's worse than hard. It's a sin and a shame and—outrageous!" she concluded as if the long word were at least a relief.

Neither of them had noticed the reclining form on the step; they did not observe its sudden, startled movement now, as if stung by a blow. Miss Hannah saw only her sis-

ter's glance of surprised questioning, and answered it:

"Yes, that's what he really did. They're all too proud and close-mouthed ever to tell of it, of course—and I don't blame them, either—all but little Billy, and he didn't know any better. I knew what the doctor here said when he first saw her, so I asked the little fellow the other day, innocent as could be, whether his sister ever talked about going to New York. And he out with the whole story—said they all meant to have her go, and his ma had sewed, and Nat had done extra work, and they'd gone without any new things, and at last Louise sold her hair: that's how it came to be bobbed off so short. Well, they'd screwed and saved and got enough together—fifty dollars in all—and that very night that wretch came home drunk and stole it all. Sold his daughter's eyes for whisky, that's what he did!"

A sound—an inarticulate exclamation or a groan—startled Miss Ruey. She glanced out through the side-window near her, but she saw no one. The man on the steps staggered to his feet, stood for an instant, draw-

ing his hand across his forehead as if stunned by some sudden shock, then in a bewildered, scarcely conscious way moved on down the street. "Susie's eyes! my poor little Susie!" he groaned at last, clenching his hands as he walked, and quickening his unsteady steps as if in a blind effort to escape from this new knowledge that had found its way to his soul with such power of torture.

David Sheldon had never known, never even surmised before, this wretched story in which he had played so vile a part, but he did not for an instant question its truthfulness. Miss Hannah herself would have pitied him could she have read his heart that morning and known its passionate remorse, its self-abasement and its wretchedness. He was sufficiently himself to realize what he could forget in his habitual stupefaction—the weight of affliction that had fallen on Susie's young life in the loss of her sight. He understood too—had bitter reason for knowing—how they must have planned, toiled and sacrificed to accumulate that sum—his patient wife, the true, unselfish Nat, and proud,

silent Louise—that they might give poor Susie another chance, the one only hope that remained, of ever beholding the world again or sharing its light and life. And he, her father, who should have been most earnest in the planning, most efficient in providing, had let them bear all the burden, never lifting a finger while the poor little sum had been so hardly hoarded; and then he stole it all! For what? Curses fierce and deep were breathed against the liquor-traffic in all its branches that day by the poor wretch as he wandered miserably about the streets.

Burden and disgrace though he was to his family, though he drugged himself into indifference to all that concerned them, David Sheldon was not so debased that he could knowingly have taken that money.

“The maddest thirst that ever raged would not have tempted me if I had known,” he said. “If they had told me!—” and then broke off the sentence with a groan, knowing well that they dared not tell him, that they could not trust him, nor could he trust himself.

With that proof of what he had become

his whole life revealed itself to him more distinctly than ever before — a blighted, blackened, hideous thing, his manhood an utter wreck. He walked far down upon one of the long stone piers running out into the river, and stood there for a few minutes watching the glitter and sparkle of the waters, sorely tempted to plunge beneath them. If so, he could end it all. That *if* held him back — the thought of carrying into eternity, the changeless eternity, the weight of remorse which so tortured him here. Then Susie's sightless eyes, her pale, sad face, rose before him again, and he turned sharply on his heel with another muttered word of self-contempt:

“Coward! You might at least try to give back their stolen money before you sneak out of the world.”

He would repair the loss; Susie should have the money. That idea, once suggested, took possession of his brain and strengthened into a fixed purpose, arousing him in a measure from the aimlessness of his gloomy introspection by the thought of some definite object to be accomplished.

"She shall have the money again, poor Susie!" he repeated many times that morning as, making his way back into the town, he inquired here and there for work, only to be repulsed. "I'll earn it somehow; she shall have her chance."

But refusal followed refusal. People looked at him curiously, shrugged their shoulders, answered roughly or but half civilly, and turned away. Where he was known he could not expect employment—where he was not, his appearance testified against him. The latter fact forced itself upon his recognition at last. He looked down at his worn, soiled, dusty clothes, pulled off his battered hat and examined it, ran his fingers through his rough hair, to which some straws were still clinging from his late nap in a stable.

"Pretty hard up for help anybody must be that would want me, that's sure," he acknowledged, completing his survey. "Look like a vagabond—am one. Well, I won't trouble any of them only just long enough to make that money somehow. It's precious little I care what becomes of me after that.—Here, sir," facing about suddenly as a stran-

ger approached, "do you know where I can get work? Any one that wants a man?"

"A *man*?" the gentleman repeated, with an unconscious emphasis on the word.

The applicant noticed it, and answered in his reckless self-mockery :

"Not a whole one, of course. Oh no! Half a man, say, or a quarter of one; I think that's all there is left, scant measure."

The stranger looked at him with a mingling of pity and wonder, an evident questioning whether he were insane or simply desperate. "I know of One who willingly receives such," he said, "who really wants them—the Lord Jesus Christ."

The shriek of a steam-whistle, the importunate clanging of an engine-bell, sounded from a dépôt near, and at its impatient summons the stranger hurried away without stopping for another word. David Sheldon looked after him for a moment. The reply seemed as singular to him as his remark had seemed to the other.

"If that were a fact instead of a bit of a sermon, it would be of no use to me," he muttered. "The place is too far off."

He had made no resolution of reformation, of attempting to redeem his lost manhood. He did not think of that as possible, or think of it at all indeed, though he saw his degradation so clearly. He meant to restore to his blind girl her one chance for sight; that was his only plan. He would earn enough for that some way, somewhere, however long it might take. But there another thought broke in at last. It might take too long—it might already be too late to be of any use. Again he clenched his hands in impotent agony; that doubt was unendurable. He turned from the course he was pursuing, and hastened through one street after another until in an entirely different part of the city he found on a sign above an office-door the name he sought—Dr. Ainsley, the physician who had first examined Susie's eyes.

Fortunately, the medical gentleman was in his office and alone. He bent a grave, keen glance upon his visitor, a moment's scrutiny, in which he satisfied himself that, whatever ailment afflicted this patient, the cause was perfectly patent. The eyes were scarcely wild enough for delirium tremens,

however, and the man exhibited too much strength to have been seriously wounded in a brawl; so the doctor motioned him to a seat and questioned:

“Well, sir?”

But David Sheldon stopped near the door, his hand resting on the back of a chair.

“Do you remember going to see a young girl who had some trouble with her eyes?—months ago?—down on Gregg street?—and you couldn’t do anything for her?” he asked, adding question to question slowly, with pauses between, in which he watched the physician’s face to see if he recollected.

“Hum! let me see. Yes—ah yes,” as the circumstance was recalled. “Well?”

“You said she would lose her sight.”

“Did she not?” asked the doctor, professional interest aroused at once.

“Yes. You thought there was a chance of recovery if she could go to Dr. S—— in New York. Do you think so still? Would the waiting so long make any difference?—make the case less hopeful?”

“No”—the deliberate monosyllable seemed to the impatient questioner long in coming—

“no, that would not affect the case. Total loss of sight was inevitable; there was no possible hope of preventing it. The only hope was of restoring by an operation. A number of years might of course make a difference in the probability of a cure, since the chances of success in such cases are much greater for a young person; but a few months more or less would not alter the matter materially.”

The hands on the chair relaxed from the tightness of their clasp and trembled slightly as they were withdrawn.

The doctor took another survey of his visitor, and stopped him as he reached the door:

“Since you have recalled the case to me, you must allow me again to recommend the course mentioned—sending her to Dr. S—— at the institute. I would lose no time unnecessarily, either, for blindness is an affliction hard to endure, even for a few weeks. I do not say positively that sight can be restored, but there is so fair a hope that I do most strongly advise you to make the trial, even”—with a minute’s hesitation—“though it be at the cost of considerable sacrifice.”

“Sacrifice!” David Sheldon’s eyes fol-

lowed the doctor's swift glance over his shabby, disarranged attire. "Oh, I'm good at that! Sacrificed all I possessed long ago for things that most men might think worth less than a daughter's eyes, too," he replied in the spirit of bitter mockery that possessed him that day and seemed to force an utterance involuntarily. Then he hurried out and closed the door against observation or answer.

He had decided to go home and improve his toilet as far as lay in his power before he tried again for employment. Billy was at school, Nat at the factory, but his wife and daughters were in the little sitting-room, the mother and Louise busy as usual, and Susie with quiet hands folded in her lap. He noticed the latter's quick turning as he entered, the slight bending of her head to listen and assure herself that she had caught aright the sound of his steps. He saw Louise's half-wondering look at his return at that unwonted hour, but no one spoke to him in either questioning or welcome, and without a word to them he passed through to the kitchen. He tried the refreshing ef-

fect of soap and water, and essayed the use of a razor also, though the task was slowly performed with his hand unsteady from lack of his usual stimulant, which all that forenoon he had not sought. His wife and Louise, passing in and out of the room, watched with some surprise his careful brushing of his garments and efforts to remove all stains of mud from them. Whatever care his clothing received was usually bestowed by other hands than his own. But they only wondered silently, and made no remark upon his altered appearance when he was ready to go out again. A half wish that they would ask some question, express some interest in his movements, flitted through his mind, though he scarcely knew why he should care to have them or what he could answer.

Going through the sitting-room again on his way to the street, he found Susie alone, and paused a moment irresolutely with his hand on the door, then turned back and stood by her chair. A little startled and uneasy at his presence she seemed, but he looked down at her wistfully :

"Susie girl, is it so very hard now?"

The unwonted tone reassured her: "What, father?"

"About—the eyes?" The words framed themselves with difficulty.

"They do not pain me. No, I do not suffer with them; only the long, lonely darkness and the helplessness!" with a sigh, a slight motion of the idle hands.

If he had meant to say anything more he could not do it then. There was a spasmodic twitching in the muscles of his throat as he stood for a moment longer looking at her; then he turned abruptly, and rushed out and away down the street.

"Poor little hands—Susie's, that were always so quick and busy, helping all the rest!" he whispered with a choking, sobbing breath. "I remember, when they were only baby-fingers, how swift and ready they were, clutching round mine. Soft little fingers! I'd have knocked any one down then who had dared to tell me I'd ever leave them to work so. And now it's worse than that even. If it were mine, that are of no use to any of them, laid aside so—" He looked down

at them—a man's hands, large, shapely, strong too but for his own sin—hands designed to be the skillful servants of a clear and vigorous brain, to fill his home with comforts and make the world the better for their work. They had failed most miserably in their mission.

Away through the busy streets of the old town and down to the river again he wandered, up and down among the wharves and boats, seeking work. He was not particular about the kind; he made no mental stipulation even that it should be useful or honest. Something that would bring money enough to replace what he had stolen from Susie was his sole quest. But he found nothing. Far more promising and efficient applicants than himself were unsuccessful in those dull days of business stagnation, and his weary walking up and down availed nothing.

At length, late in the afternoon, he turned his steps toward the mountain-road. At the Mountaineers' Rest he was sure of finding numerous calls for his services, though they seldom received any payment but liquor. He craved that sorely now, and it was use-

less, he thought, to pursue his search for employment much farther that day. But he would try again; he would lose no chance of earning, and until Susie had her own no penny earned should be spent for drink—he could obtain that in other ways; and he determined too not to become sufficiently under its influence to forget his purpose. So he planned and fortified himself as he slowly ascended, his eyes upon the ground, unobservant of anything around him on the familiar road, until he was startled by a sudden fearful sound, as of a loud explosion, whose echoes reverberated along the mountains and died away in a long, heavy roll.

A minute's silence was broken by voices shouting to each other here and there and swelling gradually into a tumult; and presently one form after another appeared upon the road, hurrying down toward the town.

“What is it?” David Sheldon asked, quickening his steps to meet the foremost.

“Explosion in the mine—an awful cave—dunno how many's buried,” was the answer flung out breathlessly as the man sped on to bear his direful tidings to the town.

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE EXPLOSION.*

A BOY with face flushed from running made his way with heedless haste over the beds of crocuses in the side-yard at the Barclays', and around to the basement-door, where Bridget, who profoundly disapproved of the whole race of boys, responded to his loud, quick summons.

"Is the boss home?" he asked hurriedly.

"And is it the boss of the kitchen ye mane?" demanded Bridget, drawing herself up to full height at the offensive word.

"No, at the mine—Mr. Barclay," he explained rapidly, too intent upon his errand to notice her manner.

"No, he's not, thin; and what should he be home for this hour of the day?"

A query the boy did not stop to answer, nor indeed to hear; he turned on his heel at

her first negative, and sped through the yard in the way he had come.

“Look at him now, l’apin’ over the flower-beds like he was an anacondy or some other wild baste!” exclaimed Bridget, somewhat mixed in her natural history, but quite clear in her indignation. “What sint him here wid foolish questions like that? It’s little Misther Barclay’d be wantin’ of the likes of him.”

But a few minutes later the inquiry was repeated, this time at the front of the house. Mrs. Barclay, who was passing through the hall, herself replied to the sudden sharp peal of the bell, and saw upon the steps a man whose face and dress both told of hastily-deserted work among the coal:

“Is Mr. Barclay here, ma’am?”

“No; he has not been home since morning. You will probably find him at the mine.”

The man shook his head. “I’ve just come from there,” he said, pausing a moment, as if uncertain where to go next.

Mrs. Barclay’s eyes were clearer than Bridget’s; she noticed the suppressed ex-

citement, the quick breath as of one who had walked rapidly, and she questioned anxiously :

“Is it anything important? Is there any trouble?”

“It’s trouble, sure enough. There’s been a blow-up at the mine, and it’s caved in on a lot of ’em—nobody knows how many.”

He shuddered, strong man though he was, as he told the story in a few brief, terrible sentences.

Jessie, white and trembling, leaned back against the door.

“It’s awful, ma’am,” said the man, more gently, recognizing the kinship of their humanity in her pained, shocked face and quivering lips. “It’s but just now happened, and the boss wasn’t there, so two or three of us started to hunt him.”

“Perhaps he is at the upper shaft: he might have gone there,” answered Jessie, trying to think.

“Likely he did.” The messenger’s face brightened. “I’ll look for him there if he ain’t at the office when I get back.”

Jessie watched him as he rapidly strode

away. Probably Cade was already at the mine; he would not have been long absent that day, she thought, knowing his anxiety in the morning, because the events of Saturday—the arrest and Mr. Leavitt's scattered money—would doubtless have filled Sunday with even more than the usual drunkenness and hot discussion, and so have left an unpromising force for Monday's work. Had this fearful accident in any way resulted from yesterday's excesses? she wondered. It might have been so. What tidings to greet her poor Cade! And then her heart sank to a tender depth of pity at thought of the wives and mothers of the buried miners. Their lot had been so hard before; how could they live and bear this?

It was so horrible, that living burial! Crushed, maimed, yet living some of them might be, suffering with all human help so far away, dying of suffocation or the slower torture of starvation before any aid could reach them. How could those who loved them endure the burden of all these possibilities while they waited in utter powerlessness? Who were they, these stricken ones?

Which among the little homes that she knew had received the blow? How soon could they know who was missing, each heart counting its own beloved?

Again and again Jessie's vivid fancy painted the scene, while her heart bled for the grief of the cabin households in which she had grown so interested. She told the children of the occurrence, answering as best she could the stream of curious childish questions, while her eyes were constantly wandering away to the mountain, as if they could penetrate the distance and discover what was transpiring there. The time dragged slowly, but no further word came. By and by she went down to the piazza, to find the usually quiet street alive with many passers. The news had spread, and people were thronging to the scene of disaster—many going, but none coming, and she could gain no tidings, though she so longed to hear.

If her husband would but come! But he would be slow to leave the spot where, possibly, he might be needed; he might not come at all that night. The silence and suspense grew intolerable. She could not

bear to have the night close about her with no further tidings. If she could but see Cade for a moment and learn the whole story from him, she could be more content, she thought. Just to know what he was thinking, feeling, hoping, if indeed there were anything to hope—to have the assurance if there were anything or nothing that she could do!

The light of the sweet spring afternoon fell around her, warm and bright still, though the sun was dropping in the west. There would be two hours of daylight yet, and so many were going. She turned, with the vague wish and unrest growing suddenly to a resolution, dressed hastily for her walk, and with brief explanation and charge to Bridget and the children set forth at once.

So peacefully fair the day was drawing to its close, such soft light on town and river, such fleecy clouds lingering upon the mountain-tops like white fingers of blessing, it was hard to realize that its hours held such weight of agony.

Halfway up the winding ascent the rattle of carriage-wheels sounded on the road be-

hind her. Some one was driving rapidly, but the pace slackened as the vehicle neared her, and turning she saw Mr. Leavitt. He had recognized her, and stopped at her side.

"Mrs. Barclay! Are you going up to the mine?" a strange surprise, almost consternation, in his voice.

"Yes, for a little while."

"You must ride then." He sprang to the ground and assisted her into the carriage.

"It was so hard to wait at home, where I could hear nothing!" she explained. "Hours drag so slowly in such times of suspense."

"True; it must seem intolerable," he answered in a grave, pained tone, with an intense earnestness that in their brief meetings she had never before seen that usually cool, smiling, careless face wear.

"You had but just heard?" she asked presently.

"An hour or so since. I have been on the mountain before; I went back to town to deliver some orders."

"You have seen for yourself, then? I have heard nothing since the first meagre

report was brought me. Is Mr. Barclay there?"

"They—say so. I fear there is no good reason to doubt it."

A strange answer, given so slowly and hesitatingly. He had not understood her question, or was it possible this man could hold her husband in any way accountable for what had happened? She scanned his face wonderingly, but his glance was for the moment steadfastly averted.

After a brief silence he turned to her again:

"Were you really going there quite alone?"

"Yes," she replied, her wonder at the question showing in her eyes. "I often go to the mine alone, the walk is a very familiar one to me; and to-day, with so many out, it surely could not seem lonely. I thought I could see Mr. Barclay for a few minutes, and have ample time to return before dark."

"See him? Is it possible— Mrs. Barclay, has no one told you? do you not know?" he stammered, the surprise in his

glance changing suddenly into a shocked, compassionate look as he turned it upon her. "This is awful!"

"What is it? what have I not heard?" she questioned sharply. "Do not tell me that any ill has happened to him—my husband!" her voice rising to a bitter cry at the last word.

It would have been hard for any one—it was certainly hard for Mr. Leavitt, who all his life had striven to avoid all painful things—to have this office thrust upon him, to watch the blue eyes grow dark with anguish while he told her the brief story so terrible in its truth.

Mr. Barclay was in the mine at the time of the explosion. He had gone down but a few minutes before to give some matter there his personal oversight, though his doing so had not been generally noticed or known, and hence the first search for him immediately after the accident. But several who had been in the office and near the mouth of the shaft when he descended were positive in their testimony: the superintendent was among the buried ones.

Two words broke from the white lips, and then Jessie sank back among the carriage-cushions in utter silence. Ah the fearful difference between sympathy and sorrow! the weeping for another's woe and the tearless anguish when the cold black waves sweep suddenly over one's own life! She knew it then.

Mr. Leavitt had been driving slowly. At last he asked, that mysterious reverence which involuntarily we yield to a great sorrow touching his tones with compassionate gentleness,

“Do you wish to go home? Shall I turn and take you back to the city?”

“No; it does not matter,” she answered with an effort, her voice having a far-away, unnatural sound even to herself. It did not matter to her where she went then, unless perhaps the mountain-side might seem a little nearer to him, was the feeling—scarcely a thought—that influenced her. Her companion did not trouble her with further question or suggestion, but touched his horses and hastened their ascent.

On the mountain all was activity. At first glance it seemed but a confusion of peo-

ple, ropes and cars, yet already organized work was pressing vigorously forward. A band of men were digging with all the speed that anxious hearts could lend to eager hands, and other bands stood ready to relieve them the moment their strength began to flag. Steady voices issued brief orders here and there, and questions and answers came in the sharp, concise tones of those with no time to waste in words.

Farther away persons walked about examining the traces of the accident and trying to estimate its extent, while others, gathered in groups, talked of its probable results and speculated concerning its cause. Of that last little was certainly known, and wild rumors and surmises passed from lip to lip. The powder used in blasting was usually purchased by the miners as they needed it from the company, whose place of storage was above-ground, safely apart from all other buildings, and who furnished it to the men in but small quantities. But, contrary to all usage and the most strenuous regulations, an entire keg of powder had that morning in some way been smuggled into the mines.

No one admitted any knowledge of when or how it was done, but the fact that it was there was attested by several men. What had been the purpose in carrying it there was also a matter of doubt. Many believed it to have been in pursuance of some plot to damage the mine and injure the company; but if this were so, the explosion had doubtless taken place prematurely.

All the information that could be gathered showed that the Mountaineers' Rest had done a thriving business the day before—that a larger number than usual even had congregated there, talking and drinking; and the proprietor of that establishment reluctantly admitted—he was disposed to be cautious and reticent—that there had been a “tolerable amount” of threats, complaints, denunciation and hard talk generally heaped upon the course of the company in general and upon Mr. Leavitt in particular. “But it didn't mean nothing; men's apt to talk that way when they're pretty mad about anything, and got a little liquor in 'em besides,” added the same authority. It also transpired that the Canadian, Pierre, and an Englishman

named Martin had been among the fiercest of the talkers; and later in the day some others had overheard Pierre persuading Martin to buy of him a keg of powder that had come into his possession, assuring him that it would be much cheaper than obtaining it in small quantities from the company.

Afterward the two men went out together, but no one had given much heed to the circumstance or to their conversation, as the man Pierre was nearly always trying to drive a bargain with some one, and had a genius for getting possession of and trading off articles of every description. One of the men who had seen the keg in the mine that morning said that he supposed it to be Martin's, remembering the incident of the day before. He had not reported it, lest he should get a comrade into trouble, he explained. He thought no harm would come of it—that "Martin was a bit crusty from liquor" that morning, and he had intended to wait until he was thoroughly sober and then speak to him about it, and so get it out of the way without any trouble. Meanwhile the terrible explosion had occurred.

That was all that could positively be ascertained. What further carelessness or accident had precipitated the catastrophe, what cause there might have been other than the drunkenness that had so evidently been a prime factor in the whole, could not now be known. Pierre had disappeared, and poor Martin was one of those buried under the mass of fallen rock. Seven there were in all. A slow counting it had been before the number was definitely settled. Others, in different parts of the mine, had escaped, but in the confusion, the hurrying to and fro and the anxious inquiries of friends it required time to determine who were missing. Every name was known now—common, familiar names, uttered carelessly every day, but suddenly set apart within the last hour and crowned with a fearful significance.

Jessie Barclay found her way—she did not consciously choose it, except that her steps seemed naturally to seek the accustomed direction—into the office. Two or three persons near the door moved aside with quick compassionate glance that she

might pass, and she dropped into a chair by the desk—her husband's desk. A pair of gloves lay there where their owner had tossed them aside. She slowly took them up and smoothed them out mechanically—the gloves that had waved her a cheery good-bye only that morning! A sheet of paper lay before her with a few lines written upon it—an unfinished business-letter, some statement of the working of the mine—a sentence broken where the pen had been hastily dropped:

“Next week I shall—”

So confidently we look to the weeks that are coming, and do not see the chasm yawning at our very feet. Jessie's eyes followed the words with strange fascination again and again, though they seemed to convey no meaning to her brain. Next week! Would there ever be another—a week made up of sweet commonplace days? How far off was it? Eternity seemed nearer. With cold, trembling fingers she folded the paper and held it clasped in her hand.

After a time Mr. Leavitt sought her.

“Do you wish to return now? Will you

go home—to your children?” he asked gently, some blessed inspiration suggesting the last words.

The mention of her children aroused her from the silent stupor of grief in which she had been sitting there so white, rigid and stunned. She looked up, bewildered at first; then her eyes slowly filled with tears as the mother-heart awoke again through all the wife's anguish, and she remembered the little hands still drawing her back to life and duty—her fatherless children, for whose sake she must endure and not die.

“My children? yes, I must go to my children,” she said.

Yet they were safe and well cared-for for the present, and it was hard to leave the mountain where she had the alleviation—not a small one in such time of awful suspense and waiting—of seeing something done, of assuring herself by actual sight that no precious moment was wasted. Mr. Leavitt had no deep knowledge of human nature, but even he gleaned a partial comprehension of her feeling from her wistful backward glances as she walked to the car-

riage. Now that the tears raining over her face had broken the unusual calm, he felt less alarm for her, less nervous anxiety to have her safely at home again and himself relieved of responsibility.

“If you wish to remain longer, I shall come again this evening, and if there were any one with you or any comfortable place to stay—” he said hesitatingly.

She caught the suggestion at once:

“Thank you. I could stay at any of these houses near—that one a little way up the road—and I need no one with me but the people there; I know them quite well.”

A singular acquaintanceship for Mrs. Barclay, the gentleman thought, but he did not know its beginning or its nature. Her ideas were somewhat like her husband's perhaps, and Cade Barclay was radically democratic in some of his opinions, with utopian disposition to view the human family *as a family*. Poor fellow! Would to Heaven he might be living and rescued! But there was scarcely a hope, Mr. Leavitt meditated as he accompanied his charge to the cabin designated, and with considerate kindness made

such arrangements as lay in his power for her comfort.

As night settled down upon the mountain great fires were kindled here and there, and these, with the glow from the furnaces on the slope, lighted up the whole landscape with a strange, lurid glare. A weird scene it was—the gray, ragged rocks; the great trees, here standing tall and straight like sentinels, there gnarled and bent; the rude little cabins; the heaps of earth and coal; and the rough framework of timbers, while everywhere busy forms were moving, now showing clearly in the red light, now hidden in the deep shadows.

In the cabin where Jessie was there gathered, as the evening passed, the wives and mothers of the buried miners, drawn there partly by the common sorrow that bound them together, partly by the fact that the doors and windows of the house commanded a clear view of the mine and the bands of workers. Strangely the different temperaments revealed themselves in their manifestations of grief. In one corner a woman swayed to and fro with groans, ejaculations

and cries. In another, one talked in broken voice to all who came near her of the goodness of her lost Jamie—perhaps, alas! she had never appreciated it until then—while between these two a heavy-eyed mother hushed her child to sleep with a low, wailing lullaby that sounded more like a dirge than a cradle-song.

Acquaintances came and went, showing what kindness they could, offering consolation homely, and even rough sometimes, but sincere and heartfelt. Jessie scarcely noticed any of them as, from the window where she sat, she watched the workers.

“Eh? and who is that?” asked one at last, recognizing even in the dim room, lighted only by the firelight from without, a something in Jessie’s form and dress that seemed to mark her as one not quite of themselves.

“Hush! an’ it’s Mrs. Barclay, poor dear!” answered the mistress of the house in a warning whisper that was yet distinctly audible.

“Ah well, poor lady! and the trouble has come to her at last! Belike she’s found for

herself that the trust and comfortin' that's so easy to talk of when all's well won't keep a body's heart from breakin' when the hard things come to yourself—more's the pity, the poor thing!" said a voice in curiously-blended compassion and triumph—a voice that Mrs. Barclay, with attention arrested by the mention of her own name, recognized as that of the neighbor who had been with little Jakey's mother. The words startled her.

Was it so, then, that her refuge of faith had failed her in this hour of trial—that her life's hope held nothing now to stay her heart from breaking? Her eyes wandered away from the fires and the forms about them up to the clear starlit sky, there uplifting a prayer, and swift and sweet came the answer of the Comforter: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. Now is Christ risen from the dead. Because I live, ye shall live also.

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The earth was reeling under her feet, but heaven and home lay beyond in undisturbed peace, a sure possession. From the fair battlements of the "city that hath foundations" the eyes she loved might even now be watching her. Living or dying, he was the Lord's, she was the Lord's. They could not lose each other. Life at its hardest was short, and eternity long and blissful. So, slowly, her faith lifted its drooping head, and there swept over her spirit that mysterious sense of strength and exaltation that sometimes comes in moments of deepest trial to those who feel about them the everlasting arms.

"No," she said in a clear, steady voice that thrilled through the room and hushed for a little both the wailing and talking, "even now I am not comfortless. Life is not all; I know that I shall have my own

again. Christ lives, and his word is sure. He has not left me comfortless."

Was she not written that night among the faithful witnesses?

Those around her did not wholly understand, yet they felt and remembered. An Irish matron in the doorway crossed herself and muttered a brief invocation to saint and Virgin. Then the woman in the corner began her groaning lamentation again, and the talk went on. But by and by, when her child was sleeping, the sad-eyed mother crept to Jessie's side and under cover of the murmur of voices whispered,

"Would you mind sayin' a bit of a prayer for my poor boy, my baby's father? 'Seems like I might bear it too if I knew—what you said."

The hours wore away; fires burned low and were replenished; people came and went. Willing hands made coffee and spread lunches to refresh the men who were digging, and the band of workers changed constantly. As it grew later the throng about the mine thinned. Many went back to the city; the Mountaineers' Rest lured

not a few. Mr. Leavitt lingered long, partly for Mrs. Barclay's sake, but at last he came for her.

"Will you go now? They will keep on digging steadily, and that is all that can be done. There can be no change, no tidings, for hours."

She arose quietly, though her step faltered as he led her to the carriage. Then they rolled away from the firelight down the darkening road to the town, whose streets were nearly deserted, passed homes whose closed doors and windows told of undisturbed households and peaceful sleepers, and so reached her home.

Bridget, with awestruck, commiserating face, admitted her mistress, and wheeling a chair to the fire insisted upon bringing the tea she had prepared:

"Take a little, ma'am; sure, it'll do you good."

Jessie looked up with a wan smile and tried to gratify her; then her eyes fell upon the empty chair on the other side of the hearth, and she put the cup down untasted. She looked in upon her boys for a

moment as they slept, then sought little Blossom in her innocent slumber, and threw herself down beside her with clasped hands and wide-open eyes, to wait as she might for the morning.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE RESCUE.*

THE long night wore away, and the fires died down as the gray dawn gave place to the day—the clear, bright spring morning, to which hearts turned in longing that its brightness and warmth might prove the night to have been but a terrible dream. With pitiless clearness its sunshine revealed the masses of earth and the tired, toiling men.

Steadily all the night the work had gone on, and slackened not a moment for the dawning. There were men who had sons and brothers in that horrible pit, and these toiled as for more than life. There were friends, comrades, acquaintances, and outside of this narrow circle the great human brotherhood that asserts itself strongly in times like this. There was no lack of will-

ing workers, and among the most indefatigable was David Sheldon. Remorse as well as humanity had something to do with his earnestness, for he had some remembrance of the Sunday at the Mountaineers' Rest, and of how, urged by others, he had made one of his bombastic speeches, full of sound and fury—empty words that meant nothing, were the expression of nothing but a brain dazed by liquor—words that he could not clearly recall, and of whose tenor he was only sure now by recollecting the mood of the crowd that had been around him, and their applause. Yet he had helped to fan the flame of passion and urge on the excess that had somehow—by accident or worse—resulted in this.

No pen can picture in detail the scenes of that day. In prominent places in the town bulletin-boards were hung out giving information from hour to hour of the progress of the work, and about these a group was constantly gathered. Others thronged up to the mountain to see for themselves or to offer assistance.

Early that morning, as soon as she learned

what had happened—and she was not long in hearing any news afloat—Tony appeared upon the scene. It was somewhere to go, something to watch, and so a great attraction for her; and all the day she lingered, exploring every conceivable place, dodging into and out of the way, worming herself through the crowd, pressing in among the ranks of workers, staring with unembarrassed eyes in at the doors and windows of the cabins, and perching with perfect coolness upon cars or doorsteps. Her ragged dress fluttered everywhere, and she contrived to see and hear all that was said and done. Gathering her information by piecemeal, she put it together in her busy brain, and soon settled her own theory of the disaster—one that she could not resist the temptation of uttering when she found herself near her old enemy, the “Rest,” and saw its throng of customers.

“This man’s whisky, rum and wine  
Buried the poor folks down in the mine.  
He sold them all his dreadful stuff,  
Till they didn’t know when they had powder enough.  
They’re killed and dead, and he don’t care,  
’Cause he can get customers anywhere,”

piped the clear, shrill voice in the very doorway of the bar-room, every word making itself distinctly heard. It was wretched rhyming, but awful truth; and it is probable this latter fact had more influence than the former in arousing the rage that sent the barkeeper flying to the door, though he only muttered something about "impudent doggerel."

But Tony's quick feet had sped away, and only her provoking laugh and the flutter of her dress answered him as she hid herself among the crowd farther down the road. A laugh from a number of those within greeted his return, though there were some who viewed the incident as scarcely food for merriment.

"Rather rough on you, Joe! Afraid that sort of concert will spoil your trade?" asked one carelessly.

But another near him put down a glass untasted, hesitated a moment, then turned and walked away.

Hour after hour—counted so by those not vitally interested, but seeming ages to others—the excavation went forward. At last, as

the night drew on again, a faint answering sound was heard from beyond the opposing wall.

“Hear that! Do you hear it?” cried the one who first caught the faint, distant rapping.

“What?” a dozen eager voices answered.

“That noise of some one rapping away beyond us. Listen!”

Needless injunction! Every ear was strained to catch the slightest sound, though some hearts beat so wildly that their own throbbing drowned all else. At first nothing could be heard, but the one who had called attention to the sound clung positively to his assertion, and, after a time, in answer to their repeated blows upon the rock, there came a faint, far-away tapping.

“They’re alive! they’re alive!” shouted an excited voice, but another, a man with white face and with perspiration standing in great beads on his forehead checked him sternly:

“Hush, man! Mayhap it’s fallin’ water or some’at. Don’t make what ye’ll break; it’s hard enough now.”

“He’s right,” interposed clearer, steadier

tones. "Best not raise hopes to disappoint them; it's all too uncertain yet.—Work on as for life, boys."

But who can chain a rumor? The very wind that swept through the mountain-trees seemed to carry the vague tidings. In half an hour the story, enlarged and embellished, had reached the town, and additional throngs of people came hurrying up to the scene of interest, late though the hour was.

Bridget's next-door neighbor had a friend who had a fondness for spending his evenings with her on the back piazza—"one of me cousins," she conveniently called him. This mythical relation brought her the news from the mine, and the kind-hearted girl immediately flew over to acquaint Bridget, who in turn rushed up to her mistress:

"Oh, ma'am, they do say they're all of 'em livin', an' talkin' wid the men outside, sure enough!"

It was mistaken kindness. Jessie sprang up, every nerve quivering with intense excitement, but before she had time to decide upon any movement Mr. Leavitt called. He had heard what rumors were afloat in the town,

and fearing they might reach her had come to forestall them, if possible, by bringing her the truth. Meagre and dark enough it seemed after that one wild flash of hope, yet it was something, a slight rift in the cloud of despair.

"Be sure you shall not be left uninformed, Mrs. Barclay. If there is anything new, if anything happens, you shall know it at once. I will send you word by the fleetest messenger I can find," he answered to the sad, wistful eyes that searched his so hungrily, as if for some intelligence or augury he could not give.

"I could gain nothing by going there?" she asked. "I am strong enough, I think."

She did not look so, and he knew the vague wild stories circulating here and there through the throng would be hard to bear—a fearful strain upon nerve and brain, as the faces of some of the women crowding about the shaft seemed to prove.

"Nothing now," he answered, earnestly reiterating his assurance of the earliest possible tidings; and again she was left to endure the silent waiting.

Hours elapsed before there was any definite information to send. The aspect of affairs changed slowly. The faint knocking sound in reply to the workmen now made itself heard for a few minutes, now ceased for a long interval. Some affirmed it to be only an echo arising from some peculiar stroke upon the rock; others were sure that it proceeded from the imprisoned miners, and was a token that they heard and knew that help was approaching.

At length, after a heavy mass of rock that barred the way had been removed, the sound grew clearer, and distinct answering raps were heard. Later still, when a deep crevice appeared in the wall at which they were working, some one with lips close to the opening shouted aloud, and a feeble, distant voice replied, though no words could be distinguished. They knew then that there was life to be saved, but the work grew more delicate and difficult—more perilous too to those engaged in it—as the opposing barrier grew thinner, and they were obliged to proceed more slowly and cautiously.

It was a moment of thrilling, intense ex-

citement when the first intelligible communication was exchanged.

“How—many—are—you?” was slowly questioned.

“Four,” came the answer, twice repeated, unmistakable.

A blank look, then dismay and pain, passed in swift changes over the faces of the circle that first caught the words as they glanced at each other. Only four, and seven were missing! Reluctantly the answer was transmitted to the anxious crowd beyond.

An instant's silence fell, and then a hoarse, unsteady voice demanded,

“Who? Call for the names.”

Slowly they were received and repeated amid a breathless, terrible hush, every ear bent to catch the syllables. Then the murmured “Thank God!” that arose on one hand was suddenly drowned by the bitter, hopeless cry that swelled over against it. But at midnight a messenger brought Jessie Barclay word that her husband lived.

In the gray dawn at last the prison was opened. The three unanswering ones had been found first—buried under the weight

of débris, too far away for human voices ever to reach them more. The crushed, lifeless forms were pityingly covered from all curious eyes and tenderly borne to the little cabin-homes that claimed them. Then, as the first beams of the morning sun gladdened the earth, the other four, assisted by strong and willing arms, emerged into the light, weak, haggard, two of them wounded, but saved.

Mr. Leavitt's carriage bore Cade Barclay home. A falling stone had struck his shoulder and arm, and neglect, the dampness of the mine and mental excitement had greatly intensified the injury; but the painful, helpless limb was forgotten as his eyes slowly drank in the beauty of earth and sky, from which he had thought them shut away for ever, and wandered back to his wife's face, resting there in supreme content.

Nothing new concerning the cause of the accident could be learned from the rescued ones. Poor Martin, who alone might have explained, was one of those killed by the falling rock, and for whatever of dark purpose or criminal carelessness he had been re-

sponsible he had paid the penalty of his life and passed beyond man's tribunal. So surmise and conjecture slowly died away. The sympathy of various societies, the city council and of private individuals flowed out for a little while toward those stricken mountain-homes, providing them with many comforts and relieving them of all expense attendant upon the interment of their dead.

There was a solemn, imposing funeral, in which, with more of pomp and ceremony than all their lives had known, the three miners were borne to their quiet resting-place, where all day long the trees of the old cemetery would wave sunshine and shadow over their graves. Then the city swept back again into its accustomed channel, the busy, hurried life from which it had partially turned aside for a little, and to the public the disaster at the mine was soon only a thing of the past, a bit of local history.

On the mountain the event could not so soon be effaced or forgotten. Nay, no such wave can sweep over human lives without leaving traces somewhere that must last for ever. Jessie Barclay, though it was hard

in those first days to leave the dear task of nursing her patient, whose injured arm confined him to the house for a time, yet slipped away often for an hour or two to the cabins on Coal Ridge. Her own happiness was almost a weight upon her tender heart when she contrasted it with the darkness that had fallen elsewhere, and she could not rest content without doing all in her power to aid and comfort the sufferers. Yet there were some other rejoicing ones. The sad-eyed young mother who had crept to her side on that terrible night followed her to the door when she made her first visit there, and closing it behind them, that she might not be overheard, said timidly, but with glad tears in her eyes,

“I told my Will about it—what you said that night—and he says he’d not be to say ’twasn’t the prayers as saved ’em. And he says—he never did drink much, ma’am, only a bit now and then—but he says he’s seen enough of what it’ll do, and he’s done with it.”

David Sheldon, after the excitement which had for a time turned aside his thoughts from

his new purpose was over, returned to it again. He visited the Mountaineers' Rest, and performed in the old way the services asked of him when there, accepting eagerly too the liquor offered in return ; but he did not linger talking and drinking for hours, as he had been wont to do. He spent more time wandering through the city, up and down its streets, in vain search for something that he could do.

"Susie must have the money," he repeated to himself through many a weary tramp ; but he grew discouraged as the days passed and there appeared no chance by which he could hope to free himself from the thought that so haunted him. One day, pursuing his search along the wharves, a dingy, forlorn little boat with a rough crew and a villainous bar on board offered him a place for a trip down the river. He could earn little beyond his board, he knew, and that would doubtless be poor enough, with liquor considered a chief article of diet. But at least he should not be a burden upon his family while absent, and in some other town he might find the employment he could not

obtain where he was; he knew of nothing better to do, and so, after standing for a moment looking into the muddy water washing against the side of the boat, he accepted the offer.

“Well, are you all ready to go? We’ll be off in a couple of hours,” said the red-faced captain.

“I’ll be here in time: I must go home first,” he answered.

The captain accepted the latter statement as reasonable enough, but David Sheldon himself questioned it as he made his way across the plank and over the wet stones on the shore. Why did he go home? why take the trouble to tell them? Was there any one to care whither he went, or how? They were accustomed to his absenting himself for days, and who would notice, except as a relief, if the absence were prolonged? And for preparation—he had nothing to settle, no arrangements to make. That decayed old log floating down the river was not more worthlessly free than he. Yet even while he meditated he walked steadily homeward.

"Mary," he said, stopping in the little sitting-room near the window where his wife sat sewing, "is there any old carpet-bag or portmanteau in the house—one that I could pack a few things in?"

She drew a few swift stitches and clipped her thread before she answered:

"There may be. We had one years ago, and I don't know what became of it. Perhaps you can find it somewhere in the attic now if you look, but it can't be good for much."

He made the search as she suggested, and found the object he sought—"not good for much," certainly; no article of value was stored away in that attic—but such as it was, he brushed the dust from it and carried it down stairs.

"Mary," he said again, hesitatingly, "if you'd put in a few things for me—my clothes, if I have any. I'm going away."

Louise looked up, a little gleam of interest in her glance—not regret, assuredly. The wife laid aside her work with a sigh; she was in haste to finish the garment, for the making of which payment was so needed.

“I’m going on a boat down the river.”

She did not ask for what purpose, where or for how long. The questions came into her thought, but a quick reflection checked their utterance. He could have no business or object beyond accompanying some drinking-companions who might have asked him, and obtaining the liquor which was all that he cared for. She could gain nothing but unhappiness by inquiring into details, if indeed he would explain them; which was doubtful. So she hurriedly folded the few shabby garments he possessed, a task soon accomplished, and then returned to her sewing.

He fumbled nervously over the fastenings of the traveling-bag, locked and unlocked it, disposed of the key with unnecessary care and deliberation, lingered under pretence of tightening and mending a strap; but no one seemed to notice. His wife went on with her stitching and Louise with her cutting and pasting. At last he glanced at the clock; he could stay no longer. He went over to Susie’s chair and looked down at her for a minute—just touched her bright

hair once with a hesitating touch, as if he had scarcely the right.

"Susie, I'll bring you something when I come back," he said.

"Yes, father," she answered gently, but rather wearily, with neither pleasure nor expectation in her tone. He had a fashion of indulging in wild plans and making grand promises when he had been drinking, and, though his voice and manner scarcely betrayed intoxication, she did not think of attributing his words to anything else.

He walked to the door, opened it and passed out, closing it very slowly, that any word might reach him. But none came; the catch gave its sharp final click, his hand dropped from the knob, and he stood on the steps ready for his journey. What was it he missed or had waited for? He could not readily have answered as he grasped the gaunt, starved traveling-bag and turned away.

After all, the boat was delayed and did not sail until the next day, and that evening he wandered up town again, passed the house once or twice and looked in through

the lighted windows. They were all there—Nat and Billy at home—a not uncheerful group, despite poverty and hard work. Would they think to tell Nat that his father had gone? and what would the boy say? The homely little room had a bright look; he had not noticed it many an evening when he might have stayed there; he thought it strange that it looked so now. He wondered what they were talking of. But he did not go in; it would be no pleasant surprise, he knew. Would it make any difference in their thoughts if they knew why he was going?—for Susie's sake? But then it was only to try and make right what he himself had made wrong—to restore what was hers long ago but for him.

Then Louise dropped the curtain over the window and shut out the picture, arousing him from his gazing. He was not wanted there, certainly. But as he walked back to the boat there swept over his memory, strangely enough, the words of the gentleman he had met on the street:

“I know of but One who willingly receives such—the Lord Jesus Christ.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### *THE HOMELESS AT HOME.*

AFTER the accident at the mine the Canadian, Pierre, did not reappear. Day after day passed, and Tony accepted his absence with satisfaction as long as her store of provisions lasted; and even when they failed she contrived to pick up a scanty subsistence, and preserved her equanimity without any particular desire for his return, going and coming as she pleased, and enjoying the peaceful possession of her domain. But as the days lengthened into weeks an idea penetrated Mistress Flaherty's obtuse brain.

"Here, you!" she called out from her open door one day as Tony ran down the rickety stairs and through the narrow passage-way: "what's gone wid yer father?"

"Knocks, swears, smoke and whisky. Was you wanting any of 'em, Mis' Flaherty?" asked

Tony, prudently placing herself at a safe distance before she answered.

Mrs. Flaherty replied by a stream of uncomplimentary epithets, between which she sandwiched the information that it was the rent she wanted.

"And when'll he be comin' home?" she demanded.

"Sorry I can't tell you, Mis' Flaherty," said Tony provokingly. "Hain't had any telegraph from him yet. When I do I'll let you know."

"An' I'll be lettin' him know he can't have me best room widout pay to kape the likes o' you in, while he tramps round the country no betther than a beggar and a thafe," declared the landlady angrily.

"And who said he was better than yourself, Mis' Flaherty?" retorted Tony saucily. Then, as she saw the enraged woman reach for her cane, she hastily retreated.

But despite her cool, provoking replies and the tantalizing manner that so aroused Mrs. Flaherty's ire, Tony pondered the conversation with some uneasiness. In deciding that she preferred scant fare and living alone

to her father's presence she had quite forgotten the important item of a room to live in. He had always contrived to pay for it, but he had never been away so long before. Tony began to grow a little anxious about his return.

Mrs. Flaherty had no intention of incurring any loss through her tenants, and in two or three days she opened the subject again. Tony, somewhat sobered, acknowledged then that she really had no information to give. Her father had told her nothing. She had only come home one evening to find him gone, she did not know where or why or for how long.

"It's like he's glad to be well rid of ye, an' he'll niver come back. Good enough for ye, thin, and bad luck to him!" said Mrs. Flaherty vehemently—"ch'atin' me out of the rint of me room!"

"Maybe he'll come back pretty soon," suggested Tony with an entirely new desire to pacify Mrs. Flaherty.

"Maybe he won't, thin; an' it's meself as won't be desaved wid yer *maybes*. I'll wait the month out, an' not a day longer. If he's

not here I'll have me room, an' glad I'll be to see ye lave, ye botherin' —"

Tony did not linger for the adjectives. She had heard all of the address in which she felt particularly interested, and she did not in the least doubt that Mrs. Flaherty would carry out her avowed intentions. In truth, the few days of grace allowed were not from any love to Tony, but because the mistress of the tenement bethought her that if Pierre did not return she could make good the arrears of rent by seizing the furniture.

Of his reappearance Tony soon grew hopeless. She strongly suspected that Mrs. Flaherty's declaration that he was glad to be well rid of her might be a correct version of the matter. He had never manifested any affection for her, and she felt none for him. On the whole, reviewing the case, she rather wondered that he had made any pretence of providing for her so long, and found it very easy to believe that he would not return on her account if he had any desire to remain elsewhere. Their mutual relations did not disturb her, however, except in so far as they disturbed her relations with Mrs. Flaherty's

upper room, the only home she knew. She might pick up something to eat in her strolling through the day, but where could she go at night?

She was wise enough in city ways to have some knowledge of police regulations, the station-house and the usual disposition of homeless waifs; and her whole soul rebelled against the "work'us," which Mrs. Flaherty tauntingly declared a fitting place for her, and one where they would "tache her some manners." Soberly Tony pondered the subject. It was a novel experience for her to have any weight of care, and as the days passed she found herself looking anxiously at the windows when she returned at night to see if any light gleamed there, and listening almost eagerly to every step on the creaking stair, even though she no longer expected her father's return.

The month had nearly expired, and the girl's face was losing some of its saucy carelessness. She avoided all encounter with Mrs. Flaherty, and though she occasionally sang before a saloon-door, even that occupation had lost its zest.

"Don't know what I'll do," she confided to herself one afternoon. "Wonder if—"

It was the old thought, that had never quite left her since the evening she learned the verse on Billy's card. She knew a little about prayer now from her visits to the Sunday-school, though nothing else had so impressed her as that one verse.

"I s'pose 'twouldn't be no harm to ask, if I ain't a meeting?" she said, twisting her fingers hesitatingly. Suddenly she clasped them and whispered:

"Lord, I'm poor and needy. Please, if you have been thinking up anything good for me, give it to me now, 'cause I can't stay here."

Billy's card turned her thoughts presently in the direction of Billy's self, and she went out to the street again and sauntered slowly along the various turnings that led to his home. She had no conscious purpose in seeking him, but she was lonely and troubled, and longed to talk with some one. It was near twilight, and Billy was occupying his favorite seat at that hour—the doorstep. He had a fancy for sitting there to watch

the street-lamps lighted and dream out his childish dreams.

"Hello, Tony!" he greeted her in boy-fashion as she sat down on the steps beside him, and then proceeded to give her the benefit of his meditation: "Say, do you see that one star up there? That's the first one. I don't know what it comes out so early for, before it's dark, but it does every night. By and by there'll be ever so many. Now, I'm thinking if they were all dollars, and I could pick up first this one and then another and another as fast as they came out, what I'd do with all the money."

Tony looked up at the one star silently. Her fancy was not sufficiently free to enjoy such speculation.

"What would *you*, Tony?"

"I don't know. Pay Peg Flaherty her rent, I s'pose," said Tony moodily.

"Ho!" said Billy, looking around in surprise at such a tame and inglorious ambition, "what would you do that for?"

"'Cause I wouldn't know what else to do, and I must have some place," said Tony.

"Why?" asked Billy not very relevantly.

But Tony did not stop to criticise; she was quite ready to pour out the whole story, though, after all, she made it a brief one :

“My father’s gone off somewhere, and he don’t come back. Peg Flaherty says she don’t believe he ever will, and I don’t either. I don’t care for that, but she’s going to take the room, ’cause I can’t pay any rent.”

“What’ll you do then?” asked Billy, deeply interested.

“Don’t know,” said Tony soberly.

Billy looked at her gravely. His father had gone away too—a fact that did not trouble him deeply, but he suddenly reflected that if his going had taken the home away also, it would have been a vastly different matter.

“Why, where’s your folks?” he asked, trying to understand the case.

“Got none—only him,” answered Tony.

“I wish you could come and live at our house. I wish we had a great big house and—and everything, so you could,” said Billy pityingly. Poor child! he knew that “everything” was an insurmountable obstacle, and he paused for a moment. “We

don't have much at our house, Tony, and I don't b'lieve 'twould be a bit of use to ask mother; she'd just look sorry, but she couldn't do it. I wish I did have some of the stars for money, and I'd build you a real nice house where they couldn't turn you out."

"Wish you had," said Tony, interested for the moment in that sort of castle-building. "My! wouldn't I like that! It would be better'n Peg Flaherty's, 'cause I'd have a nice room like that store-woman's, with carpet and a clock. I'd like to sleep there."

"Oh, Tony," exclaimed Billy, brightening with a sudden thought, "why can't you stay over there? They've got lots of room—I mean for two folks; and anyhow you could sleep in the store—have a bed right under the counter, and it wouldn't hurt anything one bit. I'm 'most sure Miss Hannah'd let you."

Tony's eyes sparkled, then clouded:

"Maybe she'd want rent, like Peg Flaherty."

"I don't b'lieve she would. You see, she has to keep a store there anyway, and you

wouldn't take up much room," urged Billy, quite in love with the project.

"And I'd sweep out the room for her mornings if she'd let me," said Tony.

That suggestion settled the matter in Billy's mind. The arrangement would certainly be a great benefit to Miss Hannah as well as to Tony.

"Let's go right over and ask her about it," he said; and, full of enthusiasm, he led the way.

Miss Hannah's keen eyes greeted them over the counter, and Tony, dropping back a little, left Billy to introduce the subject, which he did without hesitation:

"Miss Hannah, this is Tony, you know. Well, her father's gone off somewhere, and won't ever come back, and the Flarry woman says she can't stay there any more. So we came over here to see if she couldn't stay at your house?"

"Sakes alive, child!" said Miss Hannah, looking in perplexity from one small face to the other, "I don't keep boarders, and if I did—"

She paused, without expressing her opinion

of Tony's unprofitableness in that character, and Billy explained at once :

"Oh, she don't want to board. She'll get something to eat somewhere else—can't you, Tony? She says she can pick that up 'most anywhere, and I'll give her part of my supper sometimes. She only wants to stay here o' nights, and she'd just as lief have a bed right under the counter. It won't be a bit of trouble, Miss Hannah."

"Dear me! What in the world put such a notion in your heads?" asked Miss Hannah, looking first over her spectacles and then under them. "Picking up a living in the streets and sleeping under my counter o' nights! Why, I couldn't stand such vagabond doings.—You can't live that way. If your father's gone, is there nobody else to do anything for you?"

Tony shook her head rather dejectedly; her hope of a lodging at Miss Hannah's had vanished.

"Nobody to take any sort of care of you?"

"No; not 'less it's Him"—Tony hesitated—"what Billy's card said."

"She means my Sunday-school card," interposed Billy—"one I got a good while ago—about 'I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.'"

"Yes," said Tony. "I thought maybe it meant me—Billy said it did—and I knew that if he had thought anything for me I'd get a place somewhere; but if I have to go to the work'us, then I'll know he hain't, 'cause them that goes there's only folks nobody thinks of."

Miss Hannah looked at the child a minute. Then she took off her spectacles and polished them with great care, picked up and put down some skeins of silk, and finally observed, "Well!" her lips closing tightly after the word, as if quite sure she had nothing more to say. Tony turned slowly toward the door, and Billy, utterly disappointed and discomfited, was about to follow her, when Miss Hannah spoke again:

"Don't fly off, child. It's not likely I'm a heathen. If your father don't come back you can come here and—stay for a while, anyhow, till we see. I'll speak to Ruey."

“Oh, thank you, Miss Hannah!” cried Billy joyfully. “And she can sweep for you mornings, and she won’t take much room. I’m ’most sure you’ll let her stay all the time.”

“You think so, do you?” said Miss Hannah, rather grimly. “Well!”

The children departed, Tony relieved and Billy jubilant, and Miss Hannah reported to Miss Ruey over their tea the petition and her reply.

“Of course,” said that tender heart. “To be sure we’ll give her shelter, Hannah, and be thankful we have it to give. Poor forlorn child! we must try to think out some plan for her.”

All that evening Miss Hannah was unusually silent. She sewed with persevering rapidity and drew her thread with a vigorous twitch, while there was an odd compressed look about her mouth that seemed to say her thoughts were on other things than her work.

“There! I’ve taken particular pains to sew that breadth on wrong side up!” she remarked at last, shaking out the garment

with a snap and folding it up. "Now I think I'll go to bed."

But the next morning her face had settled into a look of fixed determination.

"Well, I've done it," she said.

"Done what?" asked Miss Ruey.

"I've wrestled and wrestled, and it seemed as if I never could get resigned, but I've done it."

"Resigned to what?" questioned Miss Ruey again, interested but unenlightened.

"To taking that child Tony. The boy was about right when he said if she come she'd stay—it don't take much of an eye to see that—so I knew I might as well make up my mind to years and years of it," answered Miss Hannah with stern triumph in her tone. "Says I to myself, 'If she comes there'll be harum-scarum ways, and more oranges stolen, like as not, before you can teach her the rights and wrongs of things; there'll be torn dresses and tracked-up floors, and a pack of children coming to see her. Maybe she's never had the measles, mumps or whooping-cough—I don't suppose the little heathen's had any sort of bringing up—

and you'll have to nurse her through all of 'em. And then if she lives and grows up to be of any use—and that's doubtful, dear knows—who can tell but she'll marry some good-for-nothing scamp, and go off with him just when we need her most?"

"Oh no, I hope not," interposed Miss Ruey.

"Well, you can't tell anything about it, and it's best to be prepared," responded Miss Hannah. "I am now; I've got my mind made up to it, even if she comes back a widow with half a dozen children on her hands. You see, I wrastled and I wrastled, and it seemed as if I couldn't stand it, but there it was. Somebody's got to take her, and though we ain't rich, we can get along and do for one more without much pinching. And says I, 'It's no use, Hannah Maxon; if it's the call of the Lord to you, you've got to get resigned.' So at last I did. Now, what do you say to it? though I don't s'pose you lost your sleep with any kind of a tussle."

"No, I didn't," acknowledged Miss Ruey, rather guiltily. "And I didn't say much

about it last evening, either, Hannah, for I knew if she did come you'd have most of the work, care and trouble of it. But I couldn't help thinking how many poor homeless little ones are all around us, and what a blessing 'twould be to help make even one of them happier and better. And then I remembered what the Master says, you know: 'Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.'"

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Hannah, not scornfully. She walked into the store and completed her sentence to herself while she was opening the shutters: "Never thought of that. Now, does anybody s'pose I'd have laid awake all night debating whether I'd open my doors to Him?"

She saw Billy that morning, and told him to be sure and "tell that girl to come 'round whenever she wanted to;" and though Billy did not know where Tony lived, he soon saw her on the street and conveyed the invitation. Tony remained in her old quarters until the month expired, but even with that delay it was but two or three days before she presented herself at the store, with a

very small bundle in her hand, before Miss Hannah.

"I've come," she said; "and that Peg Flaherty kept everything, only just my clothes, she did. She said 'twas hers for the rent."

"Well, I'm much obliged to her," answered Miss Hannah, eying the bundle. "If that's all your clothes, I don't think the furniture would have been worth much."

"I do," declared Tony, not relishing such ready acquiescence in what she considered robbery. "Anyhow, 'twas all I had, and I wanted my bed to put under the counter."

"Under the counter!" exclaimed Miss Hannah. "Now, see here, child, that's all nonsense. I ain't going to have any sleeping on floors at night and roaming the streets all day, and such vagabond ways. You've come here to live, not to hang 'round; I never meant anything like that. And I don't expect any more racing through the town, idling and begging, or whatever you've been used to. I expect you to belong here, and eat and sleep like a respectable child, and

be dressed like one too, and go to school and learn as other girls do. You understand?"

Tony's face expressed a variety of emotions during this address—doubt and dislike at the idea of giving up old ways, a flash of resentment at Miss Hannah's tone, and a half inclination to defy her as she had done Mrs. Flaherty, with a mingling of pleasure at the thought of really belonging in those cozy rooms and eating and dressing, as the good lady said, "like a respectable child." But at that last intimation—going to school and learning like other girls—her eyes brightened unmistakably. She had passed groups of school-girls often—nicely-dressed, care-free little maidens, who seemed so happy together, and who never noticed her—and now to be like them! one of them herself! To know how to read as Billy did, and all the wonderful things that seemed to make them so different from anything she had ever been! It was almost beyond believing. But only her sparkling eyes told anything of her thought as she answered promptly and with unusual politeness, "Yes'm."

Miss Hannah had prudently occupied the few days before her arrival in preparing, with Miss Ruey's help, some garments for her wearing. These she produced, and at sight of them Tony submitted with good grace to the thorough sanitary course prescribed, and felt amply repaid for the combing and clipping of her dark locks by receiving a round comb from the store with which to fasten them back.

"Well, you do look better, I must say, Tony. There! I can't call you that," exclaimed Miss Hannah, suddenly interrupting herself in her congratulations. "It's a boy's name, and nothing else. Haven't you any other?"

Tony pondered a minute, then took from her bundle a little book, and opened it at the fly-leaf.

"There!" she said, "that's my mother's name, and mine's just the same, 'cause my father said so one time. I hid the book afterward for fear he'd sell it."

Miss Hannah took the little volume cautiously—it was French, and she could not tell whether it was a prayer-book or a novel

—and looked at the name, “Antoinette Durand.”

“An—toi—nette!” repeated Miss Hannah slowly; “we might call you Ann, I s’pose?”

“Nettie,” interposed Miss Ruey quickly; “Nettie is a pretty name for a little girl. —Wouldn’t you like that?”

The dark eyes flashed up at her well pleased, but the child only nodded. When, however, Miss Hannah had completed her transformation and sent her up stairs to bestow the few worldly effects she had brought in the room prepared for her, Tony occupied the first moments of solitude in trying to realize the situation. It had all happened so suddenly and unexpectedly to her that it seemed like a dream, and she opened her eyes as widely as possible to convince herself that she was awake as she looked around the room—a small back room with sloping ceiling and narrow windows, with the plainest of old-fashioned furniture, its floor covered with a variety of different bits of carpet patched together. But it was a marvel of elegance to one accustomed to Mrs. Fla-

herty's abode, and its new occupant surveyed it carefully.

"My room!" she said at last. Then she walked over to the little white-covered table, and, taking down a small mirror that hung above it, scrutinized the figure with clean face, neatly-brushed hair, and plain, dark dress finished at the throat by a narrow white ruffle and tiny bright bow—Miss Ruey's addition.

"Don't look a bit like me—like Tony," she soliloquized. "That's Nettie Durand; she lives here and goes to school. How queer!" Suddenly her voice took a softer tone: "Now I'm just sure He must have thought all this for me, 'cause nobody else could have made it half so nice."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE WHEELS STOPPED.*

THE "upper shaft," as it was called in the mining district, had at last been put in order and work resumed in it, though not very vigorously. Still, its working furnished employment to many of the idlers, and the yards and tramways again presented a scene of activity, though the benefits that accrued to the cabins on the Ridge and in the Row were far less than they might have been could the Mountaineers' Rest and the demoralizing effects of the long, dull months of the last winter have been swept away at once.

Habit is strong, and the character of places, as of persons, once biassed in a certain direction, changes slowly. The whole coal-region had acquired a bad reputation, and this was greatly augmented by the deeds of other

than its own proper denizens. Like attracts like, and with its name once established there drifted to this quarter the vagabond, debauched and vicious, thronging thither especially at night, when the somewhat remote location of the Mountaineers' Rest, and the rugged and lonely road that led to it, made official visits of inspection less frequent than in the heart of the city.

The stagnation of business enterprise everywhere and the closing of shops and manufactories added to these ranks many who would not else have joined them; and all these causes, together with the fact that the reins of government were in timid and vacillating hands, were fast combining to make the neighborhood a terror to all law-abiding citizens. Cade Barclay, with all the patience at his command and all the employment he could furnish, found it impossible, even among his own workmen, to bring back the atmosphere of happier times; and Jessie often returned discouraged from her visits at the cabins.

"They might do better now," she said; "there is less excuse than there once was."

“Less excuse in some ways, but more temptation in others,” her husband answered thoughtfully. “That saloon has taken strong root on the mountain, and other evils grow up around it naturally.”

Still, in some of those homes Jessie had a deeper bond of sympathy and a more powerful influence than she could ever have known before that night when she had suffered with them. “Tempted in all points like as we are” is a wonderful sentence as it describes our High Priest; and in whatever faintest sense it can be said of his followers by those whom they would help and uplift, in so far are they peculiarly fitted for their work. There were some who listened to Jessie now, not as to one entirely different and apart from themselves, but as to a woman with a woman’s heart, richer in faith and knowledge than themselves, but quite able to understand and sympathize, and ready to help too when it lay in her power. In some of those homes also the evils of intemperance were showing themselves so plainly that aversion to the traffic of the Mountaineers’ Rest linked the women and

Mrs. Barclay in a union of counsel and effort.

As the spring ripened into the rich, full beauty of summer and the bright days lengthened, there stole into the long, dusty rooms of the woolen mill an intangible something—a whisper or rumor that could not be grasped or traced, of loss, of coming trouble and suspension or failure. No one could tell how the suspicion had first come or from whom, but it had found its way there, and wandered like an uneasy spirit up and down among the looms, throwing a shadow over many faces; for those busy hands represented many homes whose comforts flowed in through them, and their idle folding meant debt and want to many households. So the sometimes tiresome clanging of the great bell grew to be a music eagerly watched for as it sounded morning by morning, and when its heavy tones closed the day upon no new tidings many a tired worker withdrew with a breath of relief.

But it was only a reprieve. With the midsummer the indefinable boding grew to a certainty, and one night the great engines,

wheels and looms stopped, not to run again on the morrow. It was but for a two months' suspension—not as bad as they had feared, some said—but Nat went home with the tune he vainly tried to whistle dying on his lips. Two months was a fearful time to be bridged over in a home like theirs.

“But probably I can find something to do; of course I shall, for I'll try everywhere, you know,” he said cheerily, yet not meeting very steadily the glance of his mother's eye or Louise's as he told them what had happened.

Poor Nat! Can any but those who have learned from a like experience understand how the days passed after that—the searching here and there, following one futile hope after another; the awakening to light mornings with the thought that surely to-day must bring relief, and the weary turning homeward at evening with no good tidings for the faces that watched so anxiously, yet tried to hide their anxiety? Project after project was suggested by newspaper advertisements or by kind-hearted persons of whom he inquired, but for some enterprises he lacked age, for others skill. He was only a boy still, with

limited education, and with no trade beyond his knowledge of work in the mill; he had no influential friends; "and in times like these everything is snatched up by somebody who belongs to somebody," he said, half playfully, half sadly.

"But I must find something," added the brave fellow resolutely a moment later, as if to cover any hopeless sound his words might have had. "I suppose I shall, after a while; it's the waiting that is so hard."

It *was* hard, with the meagre fare growing more meagre daily, with new wants constantly arising without the means of providing for them. At last, despairing of other work, he accepted that forlorn hope, an agency.

"See," he said to Louise one day, pointing to an advertisement in a paper he had picked up: "'AGENTS WANTED—To introduce a new and valuable article, needed in every family, and so cheap that it will be sure to find ready purchasers.'"

"Something made or furnished here?" said Louise, noticing the city address.

"Yes; that is all that made me think of it. I might see what it is."

"Some agencies do pay, I suppose," she said doubtfully.

"I shouldn't expect very much from it, but if it would only help us along until the mill starts again it would be better than nothing," remarked Nat.

He said no more then, but when he went out a little later Louise was sure that he had gone to learn more about it, and when he returned she looked up questioningly.

"Yes, I went there," he replied to the glance. "I don't know whether it will amount to anything, but I mean to try. It's a new kind of indelible ink, Louise, and a new way of marking. You know so much that has been for sale is poor, but this doesn't seem so. The man that has it told me all about it, tried it for me and showed me how to use it. He thinks it will be sure to sell, because the marking is so simple and easy, and the whole costs so little that people will not be likely to hesitate on that account. He is very anxious I should take it, and says I shall be certain to succeed. I don't feel half so sure as he seemed," added Nat with a faint laugh, "but still, I don't see anything

else to do, and if it would only pay something—”

“It may,” said his mother, brightening a little. “Did you tell him you would try it?”

“Yes, I promised to try it; I am to go out to-morrow.”

He went off bravely the next morning, though in truth he dreaded the undertaking. It was not pleasant employment, neither was it one for which he was well fitted with his somewhat shy, awkward ways and never-ready speech. He was not fluent in extolling the merits of his wares—he could only offer them; and beneath the coarse dress and the unattractive manner was the sensitive, kindly heart quick to feel rudeness and rebuff. The first day he was tolerably successful—sufficiently so, at least, to send him home at night not discouraged, but hopeful. But after that the sales were few and far between, and one weary day after another he traveled up and down the streets, from house to house, persevering because he saw nothing else to do and must regain the money he had expended for his stock in trade.

He strove to carry home a cheerful face, but it would tell some tales despite his efforts. It was growing thinner, and wore a dispirited, troubled look whenever its owner was off his guard.

“So few people buy, and of course I can’t blame them for that; they have a right to do as they please about it,” he answered to Louise’s questioning one night. “But I shouldn’t mind—yes, I should too, for I want the money—but it wouldn’t be so hard if they’d only refuse civilly, and not treat me as if I were a beggar. I don’t believe anybody has a right to treat beggars so, for that matter, though I’m sure trying to sell a good article at only a fair price isn’t asking anybody’s charity. Why, Louise, I’ve had the door slammed in my face again and again, and folks have answered, ‘No, we don’t; we don’t want to buy any humbugs,’ without waiting to hear what I had to say. Yesterday a woman called from an upper window, ‘You needn’t come in here,’ before I had fairly got the gate open; and to-day one stopped me in the middle of a sentence to say, ‘Don’t want any of it; and if you’ll

take my advice, young man, you'll stop this miserable peddling and go to work at something honest.' She didn't take the trouble to tell me what," added Nat bitterly.

Then the flash in Louise's dark eyes suddenly reminded him how much he was betraying of the disagreeablenesses he had intended to keep to himself, and he changed his tone :

"What am I telling you all this for? Never mind, Louise; it takes all sorts to make a world, you know, and I've found a good many pleasant people too." But the account he launched into at once of a sweet-faced grandmother whom he had met that afternoon, and of the little girl and dog who with heads close together had watched him from a window, was too gayly told to sound quite like Nat, and only interested Billy, while it did not deceive Louise.

The long midsummer days dragged wearily to the boy. Few dreamed, as they answered his ring at their doors and then hastily returned to the work or pleasure they had reluctantly quitted, of the little home he represented and the waiting, needy

ones to whom his success or failure meant so much. But the burden of it pressed heavily upon him as he walked through the dusty streets, where the sun beat fiercely down upon brick walls and pavements and the heat and glare scorched and blinded him.

He looked longingly into some of the cool shaded halls that opened a brief glimpse to him on his monotonous round. He was growing more and more tired day after day, his step lagged more wearily, though he tried to reason himself out of it—to convince himself that he had not lost energy or hope. But he found argument had no power with his aching head and swollen feet as he sat down upon a doorstone to rest one day. He had stopped several times that afternoon; he was strangely weary, and there was a buzzing and whirling in his head, as if some of the wheels and looms from the mill had been put in motion there. It must be the heat, he thought—the day had been unusually oppressive—or perhaps he had taken cold, for twice that week he had been caught in a sudden summer shower. Whatever the cause, the languor

and weariness grew upon him, and he could scarcely force himself onward.

The shadowy halls tempted him until he was scarcely conscious of any wish save to creep into one of them and lie down; and they seemed connected in some indescribable way with a few words he had read to Susie—words which had slipped out of their connection and repeated themselves again and again as if they were ground out by the whirling machinery in his head: "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The days had been so nearly alike that he could not readily think what time in the week it was as he pressed his hands to his throbbing temples and tried to remember. A newsboy hurrying by enlightened him: "'Ere's yer *Evening Tribune* an' *Saturday Supplement*." Saturday! That had a pleasant sound. The great city would come to a brief pause and hush before it was wound up for another week's running. He pushed his hat from his heated forehead and noticed what long shadows the houses were throwing. It was growing late; he would give up all endeavor for that day and go home.

Even with his steps turned in that direction, his feet refused to move other than slowly and painfully. As he crossed a street leading down to a wharf a sudden cool breeze swept up from the river, and he turned his face toward it to drink in the refreshing breath. It was grateful for one moment, but the next it chilled him. He was certainly very weak and tired, he said to himself, but added, as he would be sure to do at home if any one noticed, "I'll be all right to-morrow."

But all night the busy loom in his head wove strange dreams, and morning found him still languid and unrefreshed. He wandered about the house, finding no place that seemed restful, and presently strayed out into the open air. The sound of the church-bells came to him there and lured him with their musical call, and, almost without volition, he obeyed the summons and slowly turned his steps in the direction in which so many feet were tending. The shade and stillness of the lofty church, the softened light of the stained windows and the sweet, solemn tones of the organ breathed of sooth-

ing and calm; and, retiring to the farther corner of the pew to which he had been shown, he sank down, glad to rest and to listen. By and by the speaker arose.

"If he would tell us about rivers of water or that 'rock in a weary land'!" thought Nat, dropping for a moment his eyelids over the balls that seemed to burn them. "I wonder why I keep thinking of heat and dryness and deserts? All the days look like that lately."

But the sermon with its wealth of research and profound argument was devoted to "God in Nature" that day. Nat fancied that it might have meant more to him sometimes, but his tired brain could not follow it then, and only occasional sentences pierced his sluggish, tangled thought with any definite meaning. With his aching head leaning on his hand he listened uncomprehendingly, and so went away.

In the evening, in that same church, there was a simple service, and its faithfully-reiterated message, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest," might have been to the weary boy

as "cold water to a thirsty soul;" but he was not there to hear it.

Susie silently placed the Bible upon the table near him when he lingered at home that evening, and, mechanically complying with the unspoken request, he opened the volume, and slowly turned the leaves to the place marked for their reading, one of the last chapters of the Gospel by St. John—the appearance of the risen Christ among his disciples. Nat read it without pausing, as usual, for question or comment, until his throbbing temples made him close the book when that single chapter was ended; then he repeated the words of Thomas, and added, with an outspokenness not common to him where his own feelings were concerned,

"I shall say that too when I see him, Susie. I do say it now, 'My Lord and my God'—mine!"

And Susie, slipping her hand in his, clasping it with the feeling of a new tie between them, answered gladly in the words he had just read,

"These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and

that believing ye might have life through his name.'” But the next moment she exclaimed, “How hot your hand is, Nat!”

“Yes, I must get rested now and be ready to go out to-morrow,” he answered with a last brave effort.

The whirling and throbbing in his brain grew worse all that night, and by morning all conscious thought had passed away. It was a violent fever, that burned itself out swiftly, hopeless from the first. There was a week of fierce pain, heat and thirst of ceaseless tossing to and fro, without for a moment recognizing the faces that bent over him—a week in which all that remained to him of earth was a delirious dream of an endless street lined with closed doors at which he was vainly knocking; and then it was all over. The tired hands dropped to seek nothing more at earthly portals, and he entered that city whose gates “shall not be shut at all by day,” and “there shall be no night there.”

So short and sharp the illness had been, so unexpectedly the blow had fallen, that it left the little household stunned and amazed.

In all their care and trouble they had never thought of this ; they could not realize it now. It seemed some terrible mistake, something that must be undone.

“Why, mother, I don’t see how we can live without Nat!” said Billy in grieving wonder.

Nor did she, yet, though the question was uttered in presence of that still brow, it did not ruffle its serene calm nor the lips lose their look of quiet peace in any answer.

A few near neighbors came and went through those hurried, sorrowful days. Miss Hannah and Miss Ruey had lightened many a burden and done all that thoughtful, tireless kindness could do, and the physician summoned had been skillful and attentive ; but no human power could avail to stay the stroke, and there remained to those to whom his life had been so much but the facing of that terrible question, How could they live without him ?

“But whatever it is for us, it is better for him—oh, I’m sure it’s better for him !” Susie whispered to herself in the darkness that seemed so lonely now. She had groped her

way to the white-draped bed in the twilight, and stood beside the form she could not see, remembering all the weary days that had come to him when he "with earth's poor needs was poor."

"'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat,'" she murmured. "I could almost bear it for your sake, dear, but what shall we do?"

How sharp life's contrasts are! At the great house on the other street there were music and dancing that night. The sounds floated in at the open casement where Louise was sitting, and she could see the rooms all aglow with light. Bitterly she watched and listened, thinking of her own life, of what might have been, tracing the sorrows of her home back to the traffic that gave wealth to this other. Even that darkened boyhood, the weary, toilsome years ending thus, might all have been different but for that.

"And I wonder how many other lives like his it has cost to furnish the music and spread the feast?" she said. "Do they know that they are dancing over graves?"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *THE RETURN.*

UP the river, lazily ploughing its way through the sunny waters and puffing out its black breath into the pure air, came a little, old, weatherbeaten steamer with unwashed decks, unpainted sides and battered pipes, and made its way, with much shouting of orders, swearing at ropes, shrieking of whistle and clanging of a cracked bell, back to the wharf it had quitted months before. The *Desdemona* was announced in the city papers that evening, though in truth it might have been difficult to recognize the craft by that name, since time or some hand with a sense of the fitness of things had nearly obliterated the last letter and the entire first syllable.

Soon after it was moored David Sheldon appeared on shore and walked up the fa-

miliar streets toward his home. He was not greatly changed—a trifle more shabby perhaps, and his face, when one looked fairly into it, telling of less intoxication and more thought, the latter naturally following the former, and the former the result only of his enforced purpose to earn something. Their traces might have been less apparent had the thoughts been pleasanter. Uncomfortable companions they had proved, tempting the tortured man often to drown them in drink. Sometimes he had done so, but oftener he had resisted because of his fixed determination to restore the stolen money—a purpose endangered whenever he drank to intoxication.

It would not be a profitable history to follow that voyage. But through the rough life on board, the sailing and stopping, the lapses into drunkenness and the harrowing sober hours, Sheldon had held to his resolution, and by one means and another, on the boat and in strange cities, he had slowly accumulated until he had accomplished his object. The money was in his pocket now—the full amount and something more than he had taken away. They might not be

glad to see him at home, he scarcely expected anything like a welcome, but they would be glad of this that he had brought, and they would know that he was not so utterly debased as they had thought. Susie should have her own again, and that one intolerable crime would be lifted from his soul.

He quickened his steps and passed through the open door into the little room where his wife sat sewing almost as he had left her, but with paler cheeks and blue veins showing more distinctly on the thinner temples. She was alone, and his entrance did not arouse her from her thoughts until his voice startled her, and she exclaimed,

“David!”

It was a face so worn and sad that she turned toward him! He noticed that in the first quick glance, but he could not bear just then to have her eyes cloud as if at his coming, to have the others meet him with illy-concealed regret in their surprise. He spoke hastily in his desire to forestall it if possible, and secure for himself a little more than bare toleration—unsteadily too in his eagerness:

"Yes, Mary, I'm back again. Here," dropping the money into her lap, "I—I brought this."

She looked up at him, then down at the money, silent for a moment in the strangeness of receiving anything from him, and began slowly to smooth out the bills with fingers that trembled.

"It's for what you wanted—for Susie," he explained with difficulty. "I didn't know, Mary—I'm not brute enough to rob her, and I've earned it back. I didn't know till afterward. You can't think worse of me than I do of myself—when I think at all; but I wouldn't have touched what you had worked so for, you and Louise and Nat—"

But at that name the mother's anguished cry burst forth:

"Oh, David, he is dead—my boy! my brave, patient, murdered boy!"

She meant nothing by that last adjective beyond the wearing care and poverty and loss of work that had so burdened and crushed the boy, but the word was an arrow that rankled in the listener's heart long afterward.

“Dead! our—Nat!” he repeated slowly, huskily, his hands grasping her chair.

It came like a thunderbolt, and tore its way through the crust of vice and hardness that years of alienation had wrought—through to a quivering human heart. Nat! Why, the boy was his first-born son! The years swept back as if they had been nothing to a time when he built bright hopes for him—when he would have given his life for his child’s. He had hardened himself against the constant accusation of that wronged, over-burdened boyhood, but through it all he had never thought of this. Death had never entered that home before.

He sank down in a seat near him, his fingers interlaced and clenched, the veins standing out like knotted cords on his forehead. His eyes questioned and his wife answered, telling simply enough, but in words that fell upon his soul like drops of liquid fire, the story of the weary weeks, the want and care, the eager, vain search for employment and the burning fever that drank up the young life. Even amid her own sorrow she

watched her listener with a vague wonder that the David Sheldon buried so long was not wholly dead, and could suffer still through any love he bore to wife or children. Woman-like, she half forgot the past in seeing this, and tried, stumbingly, to speak a word of comfort :

“It’s better for him as it is, maybe—it must be. Oh, David, I’m glad you have come ; it’s been so hard, and this will help us. At least it will pay the cost of laying him away to his resting,” with a sudden burst of tears. “I couldn’t bear the thought of being indebted to strangers for that after all his hard life for us.”

After a time the others came in—Susie slowly finding her way to her accustomed seat, and Louise appearing a little later with rolls of fresh paper and pictures from the box-factory. But David Sheldon did not notice then whether their greeting bore any semblance of welcome or was only regret. He had forgotten all care for that in other thoughts, and he only wanted to escape from every one and be alone.

His wife sighed as she saw him take up

his hat again, and hastily leave the house for the street, yet asked herself sadly the next moment what else she had expected. Doubtless he would have but the one purpose of trying to forget his dead boy as speedily as possible, and drink only the more deeply because of any pain her tidings had caused him.

Through the streets David Sheldon hurried, and away to the river-bank beyond the town, not heeding how fast or far he walked, only seeking some place where no curious eyes could follow him. It was quiet and lonely enough where he stopped at last, far down on the shore, sheltered by a steep bank, and threw himself upon the ground. Fool that he had been, he groaned, to think that he could undo even that one wrong! It had traveled too fast for any reparation to overtake it; it would go on accumulating its awful consequences for ever. Fool to dream that the paltry sum of money taken could make all right again! The wealth of a hundred worlds, if he had it now, could not undo what had been done. Nat's care for Susie, his efforts to provide for her and give

her back the chance of which her father had robbed her, had been the heaviest of the burdens which had crushed the boy in the very prime of his youth.

“Murdered” his mother had said. Ay, and he was—robbed and murdered, a life-long robbery and a slow murder wrought by hands that the law could not reach. Every detail of that life, every memory, rising clear and sharp now, of the saddened face at leaving school so early; of the weary face, with boyhood’s brightness gone from it, coming home from the patient work in the mill day after day; of the shoulders stooped and rounded by toil unfit for their years; of the hard, cramped, humiliating lot,—these all were as poisoned spears.

“If I could but give him one happy week, but see him happy once through me, it would not be so intolerable; but this— If I had been a man, or could make myself wholly a brute! If it were not for this awful something in me that I cannot kill, and which will not be at rest!” he cried.

However theologians may argue, the man on the river-bank that day entertained no

doubts of a perdition for lost souls; its horrors seemed already around him—ay, and within him.

“Thought is deeper than all speech,  
Feeling deeper than all thought.”

We will not try to follow that heart in all the subtle pangs of its remorse or penetrate to all its dark chambers of agony. Human analysis fails. Only the Eye all-pitiful is also all-seeing.

“Susie shall have her chance again,” he said, repeating the old sentence. “But my boy—”

His utter powerlessness wellnigh maddened him. He could not wrest a single day back from the past. Tears nor prayers nor life could do it. Hours he sat there motionless, only one steady purpose running through the chaos of his thoughts: he must do what Nat had tried to do. He could not give back to the mother and sisters the life of which they had been robbed, but he must give them the help that life would have given. No intoxication, no old habits, must so far beguile him as to make him

wholly forget it. Somewhere, some way, he must earn for them.

It was simply as Nat's work that he took it up, not as his own—only to restore in some measure what they had been robbed of in the son and brother, not what they had missed in the father. In all his planning for them then there was no resolution of regaining his own manhood or attempting to redeem his own wasted life; he did not even think of himself save as utterly debased and lost: what he was he still must be. There was no purpose, hope, or indeed thought, of his own salvation.

When at last he went home in the early twilight, his wife looked up in surprise, first at his coming at all at that hour, then at the manner in which he came—worn, haggard, but sober. She said nothing, however, nor did he, but sitting down in a corner shaded from the lights that Louise brought in, he watched her as she moved about preparing the evening meal. Presently the mother took a pail to fetch some water from the hydrant in the yard. A swift memory that this had been Nat's task flashed across his

brain. It was that, rather than any latent stirring of his old kindly, courteous self, that made him start and take the pail from her hand:

“I’ll do that, Mary.”

It was a little thing, the veriest trifle, nothing to build a hope upon, nor did she consciously build any, yet the wife’s sad face took a softer look and her tired feet a lighter step because of it.

The supper over—a pitifully scant and plain one it had proved, though no one remarked upon the fact—the husband and father lingered uneasily, feeling far from at home in his own household, and uncertain what to do next in pursuance of his purpose. In his perplexity he sought Susie. It seemed easier to speak to her than to the others, possibly because her eyes could not so question his face; yet even there he hesitated, faltered, and made himself but half understood:

“Susie girl, it’s hard for you without Nat,” speaking the name with difficulty.

“So hard!” she answered with quivering lip. “Oh, father, he was so good, so unselfish and thoughtful for us all!”

“He helped you so much, in so many things. If I knew what—if there was anything that I could do”—he began again, and paused abruptly.

She turned her face toward him, a faint eager flush overspreading it:

“Will you? I’d be so glad! He read to me so much—was it that you meant?—and I’ve missed it so since. I couldn’t ask the others, you know; they have been more busy than ever since he went away. The missing him and the word of comfort together has made the darkness so lonely and hard, father!” she said in a sudden tearful burst of confidence that she never could have given him but for the feelings awakened by his unexpected offer.

An offer, in truth, that he had no intention of making, but he could not shrink from it then, nor explain that she had misunderstood his but half-expressed meaning. Something in her appeal, too, brought a strange thrill of gratification even while the words of it tortured him; and when she laid her hand upon the book on a table near her, he took it up, saw what it was, but only asked,

“Where, Susie?”

“Wherever you please,” she answered more timidly, half frightened at her own boldness now that her impulsive words were spoken—half afraid of this father, more strange than any stranger—yet touched and grateful withal as she leaned back in her low chair and turned her pale face toward him to listen.

He did not choose; he opened the volume at random, and read where his eyes first rested:

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?”

Susie's face brightened at the words: “And a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will

spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

But there was no comfort in them for the reader. Sharper than a two-edged sword they were from first to last, and he closed the book upon them, took up his hat and hastened away without a word.

"I will be a swift witness against them."  
"Will a man rob God?" He tried to forget these sentences as he walked up and down the streets baring his head to the cool evening air while the long twilight yielded place to the stars. Was not the bitter testimony that his own soul bore against itself witness enough? Was there not "robbery" beyond all his power of reparation without the appearing of this high claimant?

Presently he turned out of the crowded thoroughfares and took the old road winding up the mountain. The "Rest" had not ceased to flourish in these months, evidently, for it was more brilliantly illuminated than of old, and through its open door, as he hesitated a moment on the threshold, he saw that the number of customers had also increased. All about the place looked un-

changed—the mine, the rugged mountain-side and the flaming coke-pits on the slope.

“Appropriate,” he muttered as his eye fell on these last—“this den on the cliff, and just a little below it those pits with their fiery mouths.”

A coarse, confused clamor of greeting arose upon his entrance :

“Who’s that? Dad Sheldon?”—“Hallo! where did you come from? Thought you’d run away or drowned yourself, or something.”—“Drown himself! he! he! The idea of Dad taking to water so long as he can git whisky!” chuckled a facetious individual.—“Dad himself, thirsty as ever, I’ll be bound! Come up and take a drink, old fellow!” called out another in rough good-nature.

He accepted the invitation, and a number of the old frequenters of the place gathered around him with questions :

“What have you been about all this time? Where’ve you been?”

He drained his glass before he replied, and then answered briefly enough that he had been down the river. Some one called

for a "history of the voyage," but he was not disposed to be communicative. Some of the faces gathered there were unfamiliar, but they were more welcome than the ones he knew.

"See here, Dad," said the barkeeper in a patronizing way, "you're back just in time. I was thinking about you only yesterday. There's some coal we want moved in the cellar, and some things cleared up, and we'd as soon hire you as anybody. You'll work cheap, won't you?" with a wink.

"For cash," David answered quietly.

"Cash, hey? What's that for?" questioned the man in an altered tone, and evidently surprised at the stipulation. "Want to earn your money here and spend it in some other establishment, eh? That's what I'd call a shabby trick."

"I want it in money and not in drink, that's all," he replied.

"Might as well agree to that, Joe; it'll amount to the same thing in the end," counseled a bystander with a laugh.

Joe probably thought it would, for his face lost its momentary sourness, and he re-

marked that he didn't care, and added, "Come 'round to-morrow."

Sheldon nodded; he was in no talkative mood, and even a second glass of liquor, proffered by the barkeeper, who gradually thawed into his usual self-complacency, did not overcome his gloomy reticence. Some one with humanity not quite drugged into unconsciousness, and who knew him better than the others, presently recollected a fact which he communicated to his companions:

"Let him alone. A boy of his died while he's been off, and I reckon he's just heard it and feels down-spirited."

Gradually, as the bit of intelligence circulated, they ceased to address question or remark to him particularly, and left him to himself—a miserable companionship he acknowledged while he sat there moodily silent.

He had accepted the barkeeper's offer, yet he did make some vain search for work in the city before he went to the mountain the next day. The terms named were miserably low; he knew they would be, and did not enter upon an argument that would have

been useless, but began his labor silently. To his determination to receive only money in payment, however, he adhered with a steadiness that surprised his employer. Drink he did, not infrequently, but only as he obtained it in return for occasional services in the saloon—services entirely apart from his contract, and which would bring him no other compensation.

He noticed, as he was about the place day after day, some changes in its features and frequenters. These last had grown more numerous and were of varied classes. Besides the miners and those employed in different ways about the shafts and lading-wharfs, there was a not inconsiderable city element that seemed to drift thither regularly at nightfall. A certain clannishness had grown up among them too—a banding of themselves together, partly in antagonism to the public opinion that had branded the whole neighborhood, and in opposition to the efforts—rather weak ones they had surely been—on the part of some civil authorities to interfere with the Rest and the doings of its inmates. “We Mountaineers” was a

phrase frequently heard there, and their success in braving policemen, with the terror in which they were assured the locality was held, was a standing joke at the bar and over the gaming-table.

“But mind ye, the city election’ll come on directly now,” observed one in mock alarm when the talk waxed uproarious one night. “Wait till they put in them as’ll come down hard on us, and see how we’ll keep low or travel out of this.”

“We’ll have a vote or two in that same ’lection ourselves,” was the quick reply.

“Ay, and if ours ain’t enough, there’s plenty more to be bought for whisky,” chimed in another; “the more whisky the more votes these days, whichever side it’s on.”

“True enough for you,” interposed a man, comparatively a newcomer there, superior to the miners and coalmen in dress and language, but lower than most of them in every other respect. “We can raise enough to put in whichever candidate suits us best for mayor—or pick our own, for that matter.”

“That’s the talk!”—“Hurrah!”—“That’ll fix the business!”—“Put in a man of our own!” chorused a number of voices thickly hilarious, catching at the new suggestion and approving it at once.

“Here, Dad!—Where’s Dad Sheldon?—Mount the bench, man, and give us a speech. There’s a subject to make your tongue go! Our rights and liberties and a mayor of our own!” began one eager for a demonstration, but a louder voice interposed:

“Dad? Why, he’s the very fellow for the place himself! If he ain’t a representative man, now, who is?”

The remark was considered particularly apt, and greeted with a laugh. But the idea it contained had evidently pleased the fancy of the crowd.

“I say, Dad, how’d you like the office?” asked one, turning to the figure sitting a little apart with face shaded by hands between which it rested.

“Well—the salary,” he answered briefly, lifting his head just for a moment.

“That you would! and know how to

spend it too! We'd be sure of our share of it," retorted the questioner; and again the others laughed.

But they had fallen in love with their scheme, and what was begun in mere idle talk they considered more earnestly, though scarcely more soberly, as the evening wore on. The Ridge, the Row, the surrounding neighborhood and all the frequenters of the Rest formed a number not insignificant. They could influence many votes, and bribe many more. Besides, if they kept quiet and did not betray their purpose, as the leaders in the plan explained, the opposition would be divided and easily outnumbered. The respectable "old fogies" of the city would never hear of the Mountaineers' candidate until he was fairly elected.

Aside from the mere bravado of the scheme, the temptation to show their strength and intimidate and horrify the law-abiding element by overriding them and taking possession of the government, was the convenience that might accrue to themselves by having the reins in their own hands. No more fear of molestation

then. They would be sure of a period of license in which to reap what harvest they could.

David Sheldon they agreed upon as the man for their purpose from the moment his name was first mentioned. He could talk readily, his education and legal knowledge qualified him for the place, while, for the rest, he was undeniably one of themselves and would be wholly in their hands.

Long after the subject of their remark had made his way down the rugged road homeward some of the deeper heads of the party discussed the matter in all its details, until from a random suggestion it was transformed to a deeply-laid plot; and when they at last separated there arose from one unsteady voice, angrily hushed by the others, the shout,

“’Rah for His Honor the mayor!”

## CHAPTER XV.

### *ELECTED.*

IN his persistent search for work as the days passed, though he obtained no permanent employment, David Sheldon found occasional jobs here and there that brought him some money—a few hours' service as porter or odd bits of work on boats or about the wharves. Whatever sums were thus earned he faithfully carried home, dropping them, usually without a word of explanation, into his wife's hand.

It had been so long since he had manifested any real interest in the affairs of the household or made any attempt to provide for its wants, so many hopes had been disappointed in the past, that the sad-hearted wife dared indulge none now. "It will not last long; I must expect nothing," she drearily assured herself; and yet, despite her own

prophecy, she began to watch for his coming, to build a little in her anxious planning for each week on the possibility of help from him. The surprise of seeing him assume Nat's home-tasks had in a measure worn away, yet still the wife's eyes brightened and her heart throbbed at every little office thus rendered.

His work at the Mountaineers' Rest had not been very speedily accomplished; not that it really required a long time, but, finding that for some of it they were in no haste, he had interspersed it with his occasional hours of employment elsewhere, and with those other long hours of searching for employment which formed indeed his chief occupation in those days. Then, too, though he would not spend his money there, he worked unquestioningly and for low wages. If he drank much less than he had once done, his services were all the more valuable—a fact the proprietor was not slow to discover and take advantage of after the first-named tasks were completed by bestowing upon him some other work as it arose about the place.

So it happened still that Sheldon was almost daily at the Rest. Possibly he would have been there had there been no opportunity of earning anything at the place, yet there was slowly growing within him a loathing of the place, as there was of the self that had found it congenial. Even to consciences seared and hardened until they have been deemed utterly dead there comes, sometimes, a sudden awakening. Nay, there *always* comes such, for the dawning of the clear, cold light of eternity, that for ever sweeps away all fictions and deceits, will also awaken all sleepers. But sometimes the arousing to life mercifully comes here—comes through some keen affliction or terrible anguish, merciful still, though with a lightning-like gleam it reveals the soul to itself, and the spirit writhes and agonizes in its throes of remorse.

David Sheldon had stupefied his soul for years to the extent of his power, rushing to his excesses only because that troubled sleeper within him would start into mutterings and groanings that tortured him whenever its slumber grew too light. But the knowledge

that he had robbed Susie came like a fearful revelation, and by far the bitterest part of the reparation he had vowed was the enforced restraint that left him a prey to his own self-accusings. And now Nat's death had deepened and intensified what had before seemed intolerable, and he staggered under its weight with a cry like one of old: "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

It was but to supply in some measure what his family had lost with the dead boy from their substance and comfort that he had any hope—only of repairing a part of the wrong to them. Yet sometimes his own abused manhood and cheated life asserted its claims—told of the sin against himself also, standing like some pale ghost wringing its hands at the portals of its former existence and pleading for a chance to live again. There was no chance; he was worse than nothing. All there was of him had been ruined and doomed long ago, he said despairingly when such whisperings made themselves heard. Oftenest they came in that task he shrank from, yet still performed because it had been

Nat's—reading to Susie. He had robbed her of her chance of sight, he had left the overburdened boy who had been her help and comforter, eyes to her in her darkness, to stagger on alone until he fell. And now he must take, as far as possible, his boy's place in this also, even though the strong, clear words pierced him through.

What those readings were to him Susie did not dream. She wondered at the repeatedly-proffered services, wondered at his willingness to read that book to her, yet she accepted it as God's own blessing, his daily gift of comfort to her. Strange readings they were, in which she scarcely dared to express a desire for any particular passage, lest she should repel her reader, while he read always what his eye fell upon, opening the volume at random. And yet was it random? The bow "drawn at a venture" sends many an arrow straight to the appointed mark, and while the promises and comfort to the righteous and the faithful revealed but more clearly the fearful contrast of his own lot, still, some of those pleadings with the sinful of old, the tender entreaties to return

and be at peace, thrilled him as with the faint stirrings of a new hope. Impossible! he said to himself; there was nothing left for him. Yet those promises—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out"—seemed to hold a wonderful depth of meaning and fixed themselves tenaciously in his memory.

It was these things—the coming into the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, the scornful testimony of the Pharisees, "This man receiveth sinners," linking itself with those remembered words of the stranger on the street, "I know of but One who willingly receives such, the Lord Jesus Christ"—which awakened the indefinite longing, struggled against, ignored as an impossibility, yet growing stronger, that was making old scenes and associations abhorrent.

Meanwhile, the project that sprang so suddenly into life at the Mountaineers' Rest was maturing. The more crafty and scheming heads of the party—perhaps the worst ones as well—were cautiously arranging it

in practicable shape. Some, seeing David Sheldon more seldom among them than formerly, and then taciturn and without his old talkative and often absurdly bombastic manner, were somewhat disposed to quarrel with the change and the selection made; but others who had known him longer checked such expressions:

“Never mind him. His boy dying and all that has made him a little blue just now, and he don’t feel sure enough of this thing yet to be much set up on account of it. It’s so much the better for us if he’ll only keep pretty quiet for a while and not attract too much notice to himself. We all know what he is. He’ll come out fast enough if we carry the day, and after that we’ll have everything our own way. Let him alone; if he can keep straight long enough to get into office decently, so much the better for him and us.”

In truth, the most they wanted was a figurehead for their plan, and they thought he would easily be managed in that capacity. So they troubled themselves very little about his present moods, and did not even think it

necessary always to make him one in their meetings for consultation. He had one advantage over most political candidates: he was not expected to furnish any money to carry on the campaign. They knew that was an impossibility, and did not even approach him upon the subject.

“Do ye think ye’d know how to manage the duties of the office if ye should get ’lected, and how to deal with fellers like us, Dad?” questioned one of the roughest of the throng one day.

“I think I should,” he answered with a sudden gleam in his eyes that the questioner might have interpreted as ominous had he seen it.

Yet it was only a passing thought that suggested the reply, not a deliberate purpose. There was, to his view, small probability of his ever being tested in that way. He did not know how sagaciously the plot had been laid nor how widely its working had extended. He remembered how the subject had originated, and it was only that to him still—a mere freak of the crowd that, for the purpose of astonishing the city au-

thorities and certain respectable citizens, they might carry out at the polls, but which would result in nothing more. In the darkness pressing upon his soul in those days; in the hungering cry awakening within him—too late, he fiercely told himself—for something better than the wretched husks on which he had starved his life; in the dreary outlook for any employment of a permanent nature by which he could provide for his family and restore to Susie that lost hope that so haunted him,—he had enough of engrossing thought to leave but little room for speculating upon the plans of the Mountaineers' Rest.

In the gloom that isolated him he spoke but little to his old companions upon any topic, and was far less interested concerning this one than they supposed him to be. As the leaders were seeking not so much his advancement as the furtherance of their own ends, and as he had no full purse with which to aid the undertaking, they took no special pains to keep him informed of the details of their project. The most they wanted of him then, as they had said, was that he should

keep quiet and not render himself conspicuous.

The weeks slipped by, changing the fading summer into autumn. The leaves grew crimson and golden, flaunted their glories for a little, and fell. The woodland hung out scarlet wreaths and the mountain-side was adorned with flaming clusters of sumach. The mornings grew crisp with the breath of early frosts, and the evenings chill. Jessie Barclay, in her visits to her cabin-friends, began to discuss with them the capabilities of little worsted dresses and the remodeling of small jackets, congratulating them and herself the while that the prospects were so much brighter for this winter than they were the last—the promise of work far better. And in among these busy autumn days came that eventful one, the election.

The papers had previously announced it as likely to be one of unusual order and quiet, as there had been little bitter partisanship and excitement manifested during the preceding weeks. But it scarcely looked so to any who watched the swaying, jostling throngs about the polls, spreading far

out over the pavement and even into the streets; eager hands thrusting out tickets and hoarse voices advocating their merits; knots gathered here and there, gesticulating, arguing and quarreling; while over all was a thick cloud of smoke arising from innumerable pipes and cigars, and the air was heavy with liquor-laden breath.

A constantly-changing crowd, elbowing and pushing, buttonholing and talking. Sharp-eyed individuals like birds of prey pounced upon any newcomer who had the least appearance of being undecided, often two at once trying to carry off the prize in opposite directions. Meanwhile, went on a steady buying and selling of votes—parties conveyed to neighboring saloons to imbibe the liquor which was to them convincing proof of the merits of a candidate. Watching the seething and uproar, an impartial observer might have fancied it less a fit representation of a glorious republican institution than like some witch-brewing, in which the scum—a very offensive scum—had risen to the surface.

Many citizens living at slightly inconve-

nient distances, merchants busy with the arranging of new goods for the season, and factory- and shop-men glad to be at work again after the dull times, either decided that they could not well go to the polls that day or postponed their voting for a bit of leisure-time that did not come, and so omitted it altogether. All these consoled themselves with the reflection that a single vote was of very little consequence. Another than any of these there was who paid little attention to the matter—David Sheldon. He was heartsick that day. The work at the Rest had been completed several days before—a fact he could not greatly regret but for the loss of the pittance to his family—and he could find nothing elsewhere. For the last week he had searched the city, wandering wearily up and down the streets without finding even an hour's employment that would bring him anything.

Any place where he was known was by that very fact barred against him; he had no character, either morally or as a skillful workman, to commend him. Thinking it all over, he could see no prospect that it

would ever be different. No one would trust him with anything more than such chance tasks as he had obtained, and there might often be long dearths of these, as now. How could he ever make right the wrong done to his blind daughter, or do anything for those whom he had promised to help, whom he loved? for every glance at his wife's silvering hair, every turning of Susie's sightless eyes toward him, every sight of Louise in her faded dress, smote him with a pang that only love could have added to remorse. It was hard that now, when not only for their sakes but even for his own, if that might be, he was longing for something better,—that now the retribution for his past should overtake him and render him powerless, seeing, but for ever unable to blot it out, the evil he had done.

It was in this despairing mood that he came to the hour that by tacit consent had become Susie's, and took up the Bible that she had silently placed near him. It was at the old, old story he opened, of the One who walked on the shores of Galilee and taught in the cities of Judea—of the voice that

said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He read of the evil spirits cast out, of the hungry fed, of the many requests granted, of none denied :

"Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him : and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them."

At that word the tempest-tossed soul burst forth involuntarily in the cry so long repressed :

"Oh, child, if a broken heart could but be carried to him for healing!"

"It can," she replied, trembling at this answer to the prayer she had so long been offering. "'He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.'"

"Ah, hearts broken by sorrow ; but sin-broken ones, broken by their own sins, a blasted, ruined life ! Susie, it's no use, no hope. A whole new life could not atone ; I see that at last. My blood could not wash it out," he said, pouring out all the bitter truth now that the seal of silence was broken.

“Not yours, father—no ; but the blood of the Holiest can—‘shed for many for the remission of sins,’” she answered.

“Not for me, not for sins like mine,” he said gloomily.

“If you will accept his atonement as yours!” she urged in intense earnestness. “Oh, father, don’t you see? Christ never asked how sick they were, how sinful, those who came to him ; he healed them every one. ‘The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.’”

He had closed the book, and resting his arm upon it, sat with his head bowed upon his hand. He looked up at her last words, but answered them only by a slight motion of the head, a despairing negative, forgetting for the moment that she could not see the gesture ; then rising he went away.

Long after he had gone, after the sound of his steps had died away on the sidewalk, Susie sat there alone in the twilight, wishing that she were richer in faith and knowledge, that she had known better what to say to him, and had not let him go away wholly unconvinced—as if that work were hers,

poor child!—wondering whether he would ever speak of these things again.

It was late when he returned that night, and after a few miserable sleepless hours, whose enforced stillness was intolerable, he arose in the early dawn and sought the street again before any of the household were astir. The city was silent and deserted at that hour, a strange hush in the thoroughfares, where the busy flow of daily life had not yet begun. Only an occasional watchman wending homeward looked at him sleepily as he passed. There was no one to notice as he took his old way to the river, scarcely conscious himself why he did so, except of the one vague desire to be away from all questioning eyes.

If there could be for him the hope of which Susie had spoken! But that was impossible, he repeated to himself—impossible! He thought over all the weary, torturing record of the years, growing ever blacker as he scanned it. Nothing could undo what they had wrought or make his life of any hope or worth again. Even the feeble reparation he had planned was beyond his pow-

er. Drearily he watched the gray fog roll slowly up from the water and the first faint rays of the sun pierce through its folds. There could be for him no uplifting of the chilling, heavy mists of sin, no rising of the Sun of righteousness, no coming day, he murmured in his anguish. Yet even while he pressed the hopeless assurance upon his soul the new longing grew and strengthened there. Despite his reiterated unbelief, a voice still made itself heard: "From all sin—his blood cleanseth from all sin," and its persistence battled with his despair. There was nothing left for him, he said, but at last the words changed to a prayer, a broken sentence wrung out with strong crying and tears:

"Oh, Christ, if it might be! if for one like me thy mercy could hold any help or hope!"

That was all, only an *if*; but it would not be crushed out, and slowly gathered about it many words that he had read to Susie in the weeks past. The sun rose high over the river, skiffs and steamers appeared on its waters, and a muffled roaring and humming

—the voices of the city coming mingled and faint here—told that the world was awake and at work again. But still David Sheldon sat there on the old boat upturned on the shore. His passionate emotion had in a measure expended its force, and he grew calmer, his thoughts quieter. Whether any message of peace had hushed them, or only apathy had settled upon the worn spirit, he did not question then. He did not know that any belief or comfort had come to him, and yet his poignant anguish had subsided. He saw no hope or prospect before him, yet a strange quietness had come to him, and it was with a subdued step and face that at last he took his way back to the city.

Walking slowly along the street, unobservant of any around him, some one stopped him :

“Dad, where on earth have you been hiding yourself? Don’t you know you’re elected?”

“Elected?” he repeated uncomprehendingly.

“Yes, sir—mayor of this respectable city. Nice one you are to be the last to know it!”

with a half sneer. "Tell you, the rest of us had to keep our eyes sharper open than that to get you in. We did it, though—flanked 'em completely; and such a bewildered set never was seen in this burgh."

"Are you sure?" questioned David, his voice trembling with its earnestness.

"Sure as I am of anything. Why, what's the matter with you, that you don't know what's been going on?"

And the man poured forth a hurried account of the previous day's doings and results—a confused mingling of expressions of triumph at the success of the scheme and excited explanation of how the introduction of a third candidate had taken everybody by surprise,

David Sheldon scarcely heard him; only one thought filled his mind. Elected! A wide door opened in his hedged-up path. God had indeed given him another chance, then—hope and work and wages, even work for him. It flooded his soul with a swift, sure conviction that the mercy he had so doubtingly sought had come to him. He questioned it no more than if he had heard

the voice that answered in human language long ago, and his whole heart responded with humble, wondering, grateful faith,

“Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

His informant presently hastened away, and Sheldon slowly made his way homeward—into the little room where the autumn sunshine was streaming, and where Susie’s face, pale and somewhat concerned with thinking what his long absence might bode, turned anxiously toward the door at the sound of his step. She was alone, and he went to her side and tried to tell her what had come to him. But words are so pitifully poor and weak!

“Child,” he said, “it is all true. He is ‘the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.’ He has said it to me too, Susie, to me—‘Go and sin no more.’”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *RETURNING LIGHT.*

THE good people who had been too busy to take any interest in the election, who had quietly attended to their own affairs and left politics to those most interested, were profoundly surprised and shocked when the result of the ballot was made known. Not that they knew anything of David Sheldon—that name was barely recognizable even by those who knew the man—but the information that he had been chosen from and elected by the roughs of the city speedily spread, and these good people gravely declared it disgraceful, and wondered to what the country was coming.

The wife of the successful candidate shared in no small degree their feeling, and her cheek flushed, not with pride, but with shame, when the news first reached

her. Had it not been hard enough before, she asked bitterly, that the family must be dragged from its obscurity now to have its poverty and shame made public? She had begun to hope a little of late that the change so long despaired of might yet be not impossible—had even dared to pray for it, and was beginning to take a faint comfort in the words to which Susie so clung—to think they might hold something for her also. And now this had come, and she knew how it would end. The men who had succeeded in putting her husband in office would be more closely connected with him than ever; he would run to all the old excesses, and it would end in humiliation deeper than ever, because public.

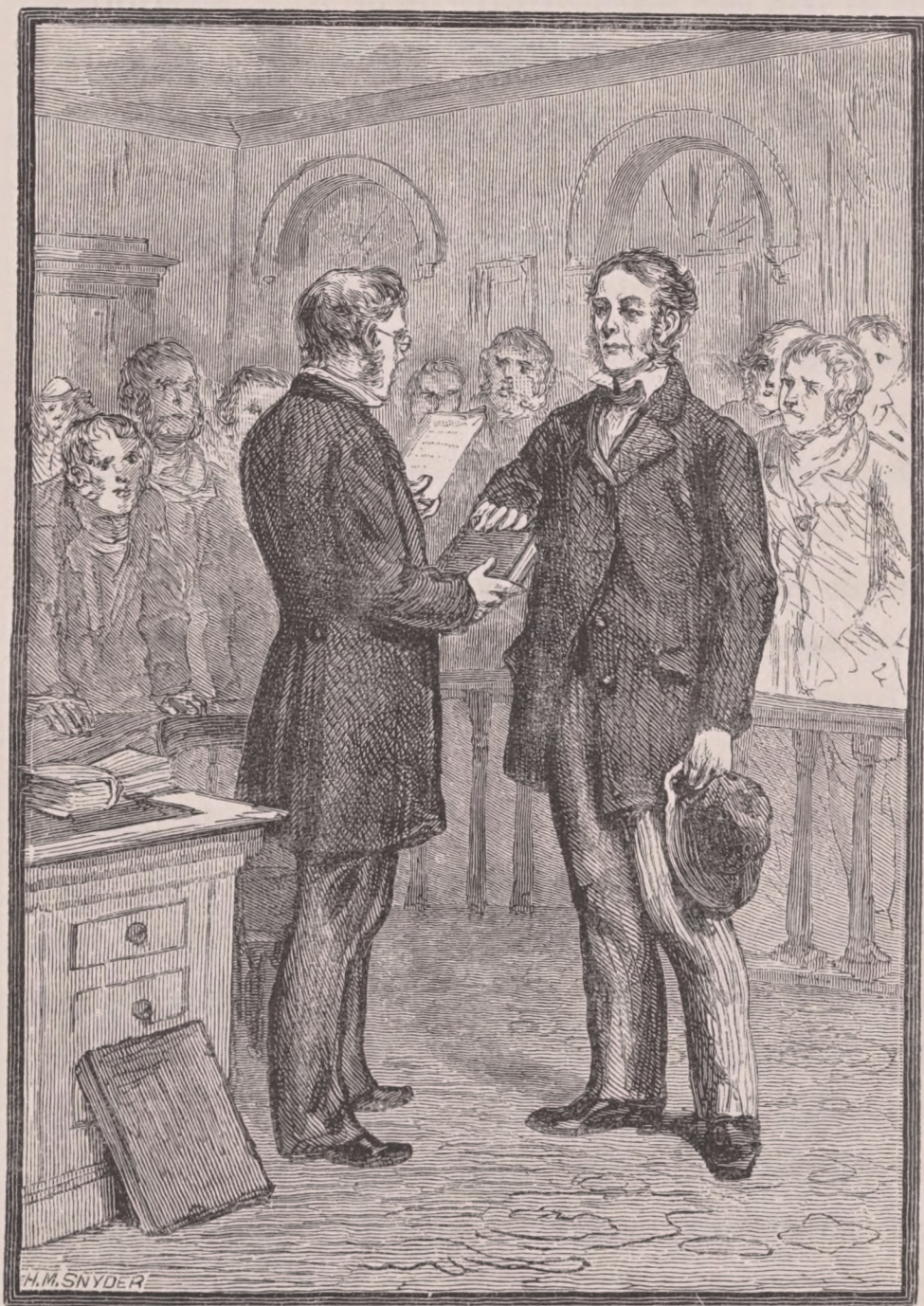
So the burdened, despondent heart gloomily foreboded. But as the days passed, and he went about as steadily as he had done for weeks—with the one exception, that where he had drunk but seldom he now drank not at all, saying but little and seeming in no wise elated—she tried to repress her fears, and waited for time to make its own disclosures. So, with much prophetic shaking of heads, waited the public likewise; and, also

beginning to have their forebodings, though from a different cause—they could not understand why their nominee separated himself so entirely from them—waited the party who had elected him.

Poor mayor-elect! there were no brilliant horoscopes cast for him, no hopeful auguries as he took his seat.

Yet, though coarsely dressed, it was not an undignified man who appeared upon the appointed day to take the oath of office. And there were some who noticed that the formula often rattled off in such heedless haste as to leave in the minds of the uninitiated some uncertainty whether the language is English or Choctaw, and in the minds of the serious a doubt whether the third commandment had not been broken,—this was repeated very solemnly and reverently by the new incumbent. In truth, there was a weight of import to David Sheldon in those words: “So help me God!”

It was with peculiar single-mindedness that he entered upon his new duties. He had no friends to lose, no popularity to risk.



Taking the Oath of Office.



Whatever had been the motive for his nomination, he had been lawfully elected. He accepted it as his chance for a new life, God-given, and he was intent only upon faithfully fulfilling the obligation he had assumed. "Ye serve the Lord Christ;" "whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," was his high commission.

Meanwhile, the party who considered themselves his constituents thought the time had arrived for reaping some benefit from his position, and soon attempted to do so. One, arrested for disorderly conduct and assaulting passers-by upon the street, boastingly informed the officers who took him in charge that the mayor would protect him, and they would find themselves in trouble for venturing to interfere with his pleasure. A curious crowd, hearing his confident assertions, collected and followed, among them a number of the frequenters of the Rest, anxious "to see the sport," as they phrased it.

The prisoner had undoubtedly affirmed nothing more than he fully believed, for when he was ushered into the presence he waited

for no court formalities, but called out with cool insolence,

“Hello, Dad Sheldon! you know me. Tell these fellows so, and send 'em about their business.”

But the grave, stern face held no glance of recognition. Some of his companions signaled the luckless culprit by a series of energetic nods and winks to be quiet. The new mayor could not openly throw the government into their hands, they said; there must of course be some show of an investigation, and they waited with eager curiosity, but with ill-concealed triumph, to see “how he would manage.”

A very clear, straightforward and fearless management it proved, and the summary justice meted out to the offender utterly confounded him and astonished his comrades.

“If that's to be his way, we've jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire,” declared one more forcibly than elegantly as in bewilderment and dismay they finally dispersed.

That was also the sentiment of a rather dolorous conclave held at the Rest that

night; and from thenceforward, whatever might be said of Mayor Sheldon's friends, he did not lack enemies—a fact that apparently did not trouble him; he went steadily forward in the course he had marked out.

In the little home as the days came and went the dawning of a new life became more and more perceptible. Countless trifles even betrayed it—the brightening light in the mother's eyes, the strange, hopeful tone that was creeping into her voice, and Louise's buoyant step as she flitted about the house. How much to him was the welcome beginning to greet him in these faces David Sheldon could not have told, nor how the little daily incidents, multiplying rapidly, thrilled him. Louise, coming down the street one evening, paused for a moment while he crossed from the opposite pavement.

"I saw you coming, father, and waited for you," she said.

Trifle though it was, it meant so much to him that he had no words with which to answer the girl; he drew her hand silently

through his arm, and they walked home together.

“And I can never remember such a thing in all my life before. Oh, it is so good to feel as if I belonged to somebody!” she confided to her sister afterward—this proud, reticent Louise.

As soon as it was possible to do so the family arranged for Susie’s journey to New York. She must not go alone; there was no necessity for that now, her father said, and it was decided, to the inexpressible relief and comfort of both, that the mother should accompany her child. In the brief and hurried preparations Miss Hannah and Miss Ruey, full of interest and sympathy, proffered all the assistance in their power; and so, hopefully, yet tearfully and anxiously also, the travelers were finally bidden God-speed and sent forth on the mission that involved so much.

“I’ll help you all I can,” said Tony—or Nettie, as we must learn to call her now, since every one else is doing so—overflowing with neighborly kindness as she seated herself beside Billy on the steps the evening

after the departure. "I know a good deal about housekeeping, if your sister Louise don't have time enough. Aunt Ruey says I can sweep and dust a room real nice, and Aunt Hannah said she guessed she should let me fix the shop-window and the showcase after this, because I've a way of making the things look pretty. Tell your sister I'd just as lief help her as not. And, Billy, if you get lonesome any time, run right over to our house."

Yet with all offered sympathy and their own hopefulness the hours were slow-footed until the first letter arrived. The great oculist had made his examination of the case, and though he gave no positive assurance of success he spoke encouragingly, and decidedly advised an operation. This, however, could not be performed at once; the patient's system must be put in proper condition by previous treatment. In a week, he thought, it might be safely attempted. Susie was receiving every attention and they were comfortably situated.

The message brought all of hope they had dared to expect, yet the intervening

days were heavy with suspense; and when at length tidings came the hands that received the letter trembled alike with dread and eagerness, longing yet scarcely daring to read it. But its first words banished fear. The experiment had been entirely successful; Susie had borne it bravely, and was very happy in the one glimpse of the outer world and of her mother's face granted her before the surgeon had peremptorily banished her to darkness again, to wait until the restored eyes grew stronger and could be gradually accustomed to the light. So perfectly satisfactory the operation had been that, with youth and health in her favor, he did not doubt that time would bring recovery; and with this glad prospect before her she was well content to endure the few days of imprisonment yet necessary.

After that the brief absence was to those who remained at home only time to plan and carry into effect some changes in the appearance of the house and furniture. Nothing costly or elaborate—they could afford no great expenditure; only a few simple additions and improvements that added a taste-

ful, home-like look to the rooms and would be no small pleasure and surprise to the returning ones. Such work was a rare luxury to Louise, and the close sympathy and frequent councils into which it drew the father and daughter formed a new bond between them, never afterward to be broken. That home-coming was a memorable day in the family history, no more to be forgotten than described. Susie, heavily veiled and with shaded eyes, came again into the familiar rooms, and there, away from the glare of the sunlight, could look upon them all again until the happy tears blinded her. There were so many questions and answers to be exchanged, such a comparing of experiences and relating of incidents, that it was long before they could settle into anything like calmness.

While Susie was left to rest for a little while, her mother went about the house to commend Louise's housekeeping and note the improvements here and there. She seemed to have grown younger during her few weeks' absence. The trial and anxiety of the first few days had indeed left their im-

press, but her later stay in the great city and the journey homeward had been thoroughly enjoyed. Intercourse with strangers, new experiences, new scenes, and, more than all, new hopes, had brightened the worn face and lent to voice and manner an unwonted animation. The eyes that watched her were quick to see the change—saw it with pleasure and self-reproach strangely blended :

“Then you like the changes we have made, Mary? Like them all?”

“Yes, all. How could I help it, when you have arranged everything so nicely? It is so sweet to come home in this way! I am so glad to have everything just as it is, and most of all, you, David!” Her look said more than her words as she turned toward him and dropped her head for a moment upon his shoulder.

Miss Nettie Durand, who had flitted in and out numerous times that day, was quite impressed with the joyfulness of the occasion.

“It ’most makes me wish we had somebody to come home too ; only there are enough of us now,” she remarked that evening.

“I should think so, if the mending is any

sign," answered Miss Hannah, without looking up from the school-apron she was supplying with a new pocket. Nevertheless, in her secret heart she was already beginning to take not a little pride in her adopted niece, and to find that bright young presence in the house so enjoyable as to render her efforts at resignation in that direction no longer arduous.

The vigorous measures of the new mayor in suppressing some of the evils which had grown up under a former lax rule soon attracted favorable comment, and the press, with a beautiful forgetfulness of the past, congratulated "our city upon its judicious selection." Because of that sombre past Mayor Sheldon knew well with whom he was dealing, and how to reach them most effectively; and the bitter denunciation that came to him from certain quarters of having deceived his supporters and betrayed his friends in no wise altered his purpose. They speedily learned the uselessness of any appeal to him in his official capacity for either recognition or indulgence; yet when one of them met him upon the street one day,

he answered readily enough to the old name, listened patiently to the mingling of reproaches and complaints, and then replied quietly,

“You never were my friends. Do you call that friendship which will try to drag a man down until he becomes a curse to himself, his family and the world? Did you think that for the sake of such I would perjure myself and let riot and ruin loose in the city? Is that your idea of ‘dealing square,’ as you call it? You were my enemies, Dan; you are your own enemies now, and you know it. Turn about and give up the old ways, and I’ll help you all I can; but whatever is contrary to law, order and right I will fight against and put down as far as it is in my power to do so. I took the oath of office honestly, and I mean to fulfill it to the best of my ability. You may all as well understand that.”

It was a definition of his policy sufficiently clear to be comprehended, and was amply discussed by those most interested; but their vengeful remarks concerning his readiness to forget old companions were wholly unjust.

Some, indeed, would have been glad, a little later, had his memory been more treacherous; his perfect recollection of them and their antecedents proved exceedingly inconvenient. But there were others among the miners and about the mountain for whom his compassionate interest never wearied, and whom he strove to aid, influence and uplift by every means at his command.

Gradually he gathered about him on the police force and in other capacities a few from out the old ranks—faithful, fearless and shrewd men whose strength and courage could be relied upon. And though the proverb, “Set a thief to catch a thief,” was tauntingly quoted, yet “Sheldon’s specials” made themselves useful, and were no insignificant power in the repression of disorder and the efficient enforcement of law that was steadily bringing the city into a better and more healthful condition.

One effect of the new rule was manifested after a few months. The Mountaineers’ Rest had counted too confidently upon the license and benefit to flow to it from the new administration, and in the week preceding and im-

mediately following the inauguration the proprietor had ventured upon numerous extravagant expenditures and negotiations, adding to his building and ordering supplies in the expectation of a greatly-increased business. But the event had greatly disappointed him. The place was under too close watch to be as profitable in many ways as formerly. Custom declined on that account, embarrassment and failure to meet expenses followed, and one day—or rather one night, for the flitting was accomplished in the darkness—the owner “folded” his “tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away,” none in the neighborhood knew whither.

Over this departure Jessie Barclay and numerous wives and mothers on the Ridge and in the Row heartily rejoiced, and the superintendent drew a long breath, as if the mountain-air had suddenly grown purer. With the lifting of this incubus it seemed to him and to his wife that their plans and purposes of help assumed new hopefulness, and they took fresh courage in recognizing, as they soon did, an efficient co-worker in Mayor Sheldon. It was, in truth, the be-

ginning of a new era for the mountain-neighborhood, the dawning of a day that is still growing brighter.

Mayor Sheldon's first term of office expired nearly two years since, but he was re-elected by a far different vote from the one that first gave him his position. The city has prospered under his reign, and though there are some who wish he would shine more in public dinners, and not devote so much time to the vagabond and tempted—that he would take a deeper interest in “rings” and parties, and were not quite so staunch a friend of the temperance cause—still, he is deservedly popular, and was re-elected by a flattering vote.

The family have removed to a more commodious house, tasteful though unostentatious; but Billy, a healthful, merry school-boy, takes his homeward way around the old street still for the purpose of seeing “Cousin Nettie” safe home and chatting a little with Miss Hannah and Miss Ruey, with whom he was always a favorite, and who like him none the less for his admiration of “our Nettie,” who has grown to a pretty, graceful girlhood,

and is the delight of the quiet little rooms behind the store.

Jessie Barclay, queen in her own merry, rosy household, has gradually extended her kingdom until it embraces an oversight of many of the ignorant, the tempted, the poor and the suffering around her. Others, true, noble, warm-hearted women, have long since joined hands with her in her mission on the mountain, but she has no more earnest friends, no more faithful aids, than bright-eyed, gentle, sweet-faced Susie, winning always her way by her sunniness, and straightforward, thoughtful, practical Louise, skillful in planning and tireless in doing.

"All is well that ends well," and the evil years are happily blotted out.

Say you so, O reader? David Sheldon would answer otherwise. Redeemed indeed, blessing his family, doing good in the world, striving to obey the voice that still is calling "Follow me," he cannot forget the past or make it as though it had not been. The soul still bears its scars. He realizes it often in his work for others; he knows it in the

fierce battles with old temptations that he still must wage, and in the flood of dark memories that can never lose their remorseful power. Among the home-faces he always misses one, and whenever in the streets he passes a shabbily-dressed, anxious-eyed working-boy, the old wound throbs and bleeds.

Only eternity can restore the "years that the canker-worm hath eaten," only heaven's full sunlight banish the shadows that linger in the heart of His Honor the Mayor.

THE END.





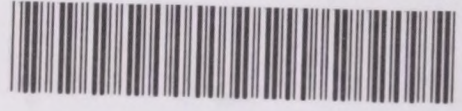








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